

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

Ishavasya Upanishad

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

*Including the teachings of
Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Ishavasya Upanishad



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013
GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA
23rd–27th October 2013

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Published by Bihar School of Yoga

First edition 1973

Reprinted 1984, 1992

Published by Yoga Publications Trust

Second edition 2013

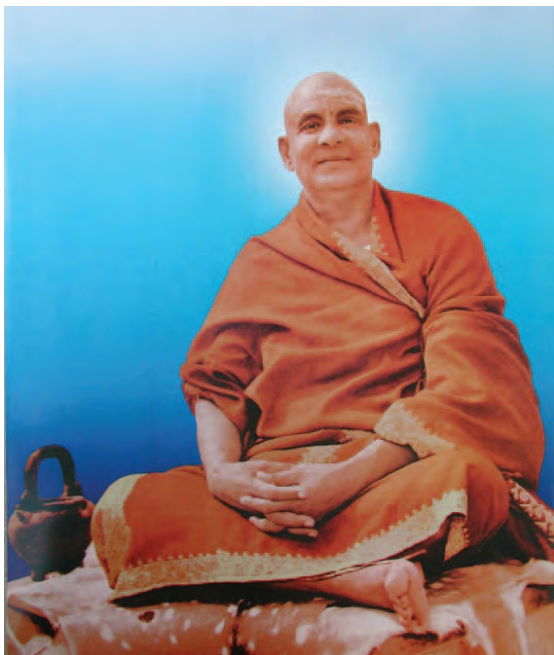
ISBN: 978-81-85787-21-2

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net

www.rikhiapeeth.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Introduction

The Upanishads were the culmination of the entire body of vedic literature and contain their philosophical essence. Here the ritualism of the Vedas gives way to a ceaseless search for the truth. The Upanishads do not require the performance of any action as such, but reveal the ultimate truth, which liberates the seeker at once. These texts are the culmination of the quest for reality. The transition of the Indian mind from the ritualistic details of the Brahmanas to the sublime doctrine of the Upanishads is a dramatic and a remarkable event in the Sanatana tradition.

The *Rig Veda* describes a creator from outside, a controller of mundane events, to whom one prays for worldly benefits. Speaking of the *Purusha*, the Ultimate Person, it says, “Purusha has a thousand heads . . . thousand eyes . . . He formed those aerial creatures and animals, both wild and tame.” In the Upanishads, however, the viewpoint is entirely changed and the centre of interest is not a creature from outside, but within the self. This change of position does not carry with it any elaborate philosophical discussions or subtle analysis of the mind. It comes as a matter of direct perception, and the conviction with which the truth is grasped impresses the reader.

Definition

The word ‘upanishad’ is comprised of three words: *upa* + *ni* + *shad*. *Upa* means ‘near’, *ni* ‘attentively’ and *shad* ‘to sit’. Thus, the term Upanishad actually describes the situation in which these unique texts were transmitted. The student or disciple sat near the realized master and listened attentively as he expounded his experiences and understanding of the ultimate reality. Some scholars call the Upanishads ‘secret doctrine’; others call them ‘book of knowledge’. Practically, it means notes taken down by disciples in ancient days, when the guru gave lessons on the supreme knowledge. The lessons were recorded in the minds of the disciples and written down later on for posterity.

Since the instructions of a guru were first heard and remembered by the disciples and noted down later, the Upanishads are also known as *shruti*, ‘that knowledge which is heard’. This teaching was said to destroy the ignorance or illusion of the spiritual aspirant regarding what is self and non-self, or real and unreal, in relation to the absolute and relative reality. Adi Shankara, in his introduction to the *Taittiriyaopanishad*, says: “Knowledge of Brahman is called Upanishad, as it loosens the bonds of birth and death and destroys them altogether, and as it leads the seeker very near to Brahman wherein the highest God is seated.”

During the period when the upanishadic texts were propounded, this knowledge of the ultimate reality was considered sacred and was not easily accessible to all. It was imparted on a very selective basis after the mental and spiritual calibre of the seeker had been tested and proven. Each Upanishad reflected the teachings and tradition of a realized master and was connected with a specific Veda and vedic school, or *shaka*. At one time the vedic schools and their respective Upanishads numbered 1,180, but today only 108 are generally known, although about 200 are still extant. These texts contain the direct teachings of great scholars, sages and saints of their time and reflect the heights of their spiritual insight and understanding.

Language

There are ten principal Upanishads, thirty minor ones, and in all 108 popular Upanishads. Some of them are quite old and can be traced back many centuries before the birth of Christ. They are written in a language which was spoken in India during the vedic period. The Sanskrit of the Upanishads is different from the Sanskrit language of today. The rules of grammar are also different. Usually, a present-day student of Sanskrit finds it difficult to read the Upanishads independently. The language used in the Upanishads is known as old or vedic Sanskrit.

Search for knowledge

The seers of the Upanishads and their social and historical background are subjects of great interest. In India, the brahmins safeguarded the religious and theological knowledge of the country. Whatever they preached, sincerely or insincerely, pertained to this lower world, such as rituals and ceremonies for birth, marriage, funerals, and so on. Rituals such as propitiating gods or worshipping nature were taught to the people. The study of the history of the vedic period reveals that there was a time when the masses were very interested in rituals and practised *karma kanda*, or ritualistic religion. In big *yajnas*, fire ceremonies, thousands of people would get together to take *somarasa*, the spiritual drink, and to perform fire worship. In order to conduct the worship, many thousand quintals of food grains would be offered as oblation to the fire.

The vedic people had their own definition, description and dictionary of knowledge about God. It was nevertheless a good thing for householders. Although there were few people in society at that time, still they often questioned: "Is what the priests preach about God and the temples all true?" Since people had their own liabilities and responsibilities to their families, they could not find the time to search for a true answer to their enquiries. Some of them then decided to renounce their responsibilities and retire into the forest

in seclusion for contemplation and meditation, to find out the truth: “Is there a God sitting somewhere?” “Or are there many gods responsible for different departments of the world?” “Are they like angels or ghosts?” “Does God come or send somebody as His representative?” Religious beliefs were questioned and people wanted to know the truth. Therefore, after fulfilling the obligations of family life, they retired into seclusion, either with their spouse or alone.

Brahma vidya gurus

Those who went into seclusion were not sannyasins in the strict sense of the word. They led simple and austere lives in a hermitage, and contemplated on the nature of the universe and their inner self. They aspired to know the fundamentals of nature and the mysteries of life, death, birth and rebirth. Some of them received the answers and they were known as *rishis*, or seers, since they ‘saw’. The rishis then imparted this true knowledge to those who were following the religion of the temples blindly. They believed that at least a few among them would be helped and lifted up from stagnant beliefs. A band of disciples was formed who were trained in the new way of thought. When these disciples realized the truth, they were sent far and wide. In this way, the *guru parampara*, the tradition of gurus or teachers, came into existence. The enlightened teachers came to be known as *Brahma vidya* gurus, as they imparted the highest knowledge.

Unlike ordinary priests, the gurus did not conduct worship, prayers or sermons in a temple. They possessed knowledge and communicated it to their disciples, and the disciples in turn communicated it to their own disciples. The whole truth was communicated in this manner. Then, from time to time, new successors of the tradition came up. However, the ultimate truth for which the great men had renounced was not simple to realize. It was a truth of the unknown, which will ever remain unknown. Perhaps they obtained only a glimpse of that true knowledge, and this fact is accepted and admitted in all the Upanishads. The

Upanishads do not claim or suggest that they have told the whole truth.

The Upanishads often use the word *neti*, which means 'this is not the end'. Suppose you want to describe a person, but are unable to express everything about him. You may say, "This is not everything about him." In Sanskrit, the root *na* means 'not' and *iti* means 'the end'. It means that the Upanishads admit that whatever they have spoken about the truth is not the ultimate 'end all'. The entire universe or God, or the supreme truth, is not only this much. Throughout the world, there was never a set of frank and true thinkers like the ancient rishis, who dedicated and spent their lives in search and re-search of the truth, and ultimately declared its forms. Their final statement is: "Not only this; not only this."

The origin of Brahma vidya

In the tradition of Brahma vidya gurus, many rishis and great men followed. From time to time they added their own fund of knowledge to what already existed. Who were these gurus? The *kshatriyas*, the warrior class, led this movement of truth in India. They questioned the authority of the brahminical statements on gods, demi-gods and natural gods, although they did not object to worship. The *kshatriyas* were great kings and warriors, and thought it proper to seek true knowledge. They renounced their homes and went into the forest to find out the truth. The Upanishads make us believe that some of these *kshatriyas* became great rishis.

When the brahmins came to know that a particular science of truth was being preached by such rishis, they could not understand it. At that time the people were practising only karma kanda. They were given to believe that if you perform good actions in this world, they would be rewarded in heaven by certain gods. The brahmins could not understand the truth that 'there is one essence and that is all-pervading'. They believed that God sits somewhere, and from there He controls the movements of the stars, sun

and moon. When the truth of the supreme, the ultimate, the final, the conclusive, the all-pervading, One essence was propagated, the brahmins could not understand it, as it was new to them.

Then the great brahmin priests began going to the kshatriya rishis in search of knowledge. One such brahmin named Yajnavalkya went to Ajatshatru, the king of Varanasi, and many others went to King Janaka, a kshatriya emperor, to gain knowledge of the True Being. Finally, Brahma vidya was given to all. Many brahmins later thought that this might mislead the masses, so the truth was not expounded by them. They believed that all the Upanishads should be first properly compiled, and imparted only to a disciple by his guru by word of mouth.

Wisdom of the Upanishads

Therefore, the disciples first memorized the Upanishads before receiving permission to write them down. Each and every word was learned by heart with closed eyes in a traditional way. It was considered desirable to maintain this tradition, so that even if the books were lost or destroyed at any time, they could be rewritten. All sannyasins should know all the Upanishads by heart. The Upanishads do not contain sectarian knowledge. They are never considered as knowledge or wisdom of the Hindus. They comprise the wisdom that the seers developed in the geographical area of this country. This knowledge has nothing to do with any sect, and has very little to do with any god. It always talks about the true essence of the universe, which pervades all sentient and insentient beings. Thus, the Upanishads should be regarded as the fountainhead of the supreme knowledge.

Opinions expressed on the Upanishads by some of the great scholars are noteworthy. The great philosopher Schopenhauer said that the Upanishads were a solace in his life, and even after death they would continue to be a solace to his soul. In the same manner, Max Muller, the great German scholar, wrote the following in his introduction to

The Sacred Books of the East: “If there could be any collection of the permanent, unchanging, unchallengeable thoughts of the Supreme Being, free from any tinge of sectarianism and communalism, it was the Upanishads.” Research has been done on the Upanishads, and they have been translated into English, German, French, and other languages. The Upanishads have received attention from many European scholars and authors, who presented the translation to their countrymen. The Upanishads find a special place in the higher faculties of the department of philosophy in nearly all universities.

Major Upanishads

The Upanishads have been composed in different periods of time, the earlier ones having a more archaic language and sometimes being written in prose. The later Upanishads have been invariably written in metre form. The earliest ones are supposed to have been written around 500 BC. They are: *Ishavasya*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chhandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka*. These ten are known as the major Upanishads. They are rich in profound philosophical thought and give vivid descriptions of the nature of the *Atman*, the supreme, individual soul, in a variety of ways, and expound suitable methods and aids to attain the immortal *Brahman*, the absolute, universal consciousness.

Ishavasya Upanishad

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* is a small text of eighteen verses, which comprises the last chapter of the *Yajur Veda*. The entire *Yajur Veda* is divided into forty chapters. The first thirty-nine chapters talk about the mantras in connection with rituals, ceremonies, worship, poems, incantations, hymns, and so on, and the last chapter talks of nothing but the supreme knowledge. Thus, this Upanishad is considered to be the seed of the entire Indian philosophy, as well as the vedantic philosophy. The philosophy of *Parabrahman*, the Supreme

Being, and *Brahma vidya*, the cosmic knowledge, developed from this Upanishad. Hence, it is also known as the *Vedanta Upanishad*, but *Ishavasya* is its most popular name.

This Upanishad has been named after the initial word in the first line of the first mantra: *Ishavasya midam sarvam* – “This whole world is pervaded by the Lord.” Meditation on this one idea alone will lead the seeker to the attainment of the knowledge of the Self. By contemplation on the significance of this line, the aspirant will become a seer of the oneness. He will have a direct vision of the Absolute and the state of inner illumination. Although the concepts found within this Upanishad are apparently simple and intelligible, in reality, it is one of the most difficult to understand properly. The aspirant should therefore study these verses with a one-pointed and pure mind, under the guidance of an experienced teacher. Then, all the knowledge contained within them will become clear.

The text contains reflections on various topics, the central theme being the attempt to affect a compromise between the older ritualism and the newer metaphysics. The Upanishad has not yet lost its moorings in vedic mythology and we find reminiscences in it of vedic deities, such as Matarishvan, Yama, Surya, Prajapati and Agni. The Upanishad seems to have been written at a time when a transition was taking place from the old vedic legendary hymns to the new upanishadic philosophical verses. The reference to the ‘previous seers’ in this Upanishad presupposes a long line of antecedent thinkers, each philosophizing in his own way, the cumulative result of their reflections being transmitted down to the times of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*.

This Upanishad takes us to a discussion of the Self, regarded as bright, incorporeal, whole, pure and uncontaminated by evil. He is the seer, omnipresent and self-existent. It is due to this Self that things have been disposed of rightly for eternity (v. 8). A little after this, we are told that even though this bright luminous Self exists as the eternal background of all things, fulfilling all the conditions of the

highest reality, still His face is hidden by a golden disc, which comes like a cloud between the Sun and the observer. Finally, the author insists upon the identity of the Self in man, and the Self in the Sun (v. 16).

The mysticism of the Upanishad as a whole is contained in a peculiar description of the Self, which goes beyond a mere metaphysical treatment. The mystical description of the Atman in this Upanishad tells us that it does not move, yet is even faster than the mind; that none of the senses are able to reach it; that even though stationary, it moves beyond anything that has any motion. In this way, an attempt is made to reconcile contradictions in a mystical description of the Atman. "The Self moves and yet does not move. It is both far and near. It is internal to everything and at the same time it is external to everything that exists." (v. 5)

One of the main features of the *Ishavasya Upanishad* is the ethical advice that it offers, and the ethics of this Upanishad are definitely based upon the metaphysical position advanced in it. The very opening words of this Upanishad tell us that God pervades everything. As a corollary from this metaphysical position, the ethical advice it offers is that a man ought to enjoy whatever God bestows on him in the firm belief that, as He pervades everything, whatever God bestows on him must be good. It follows naturally that the Upanishad should forbid us from coveting another man's property or from doing harm to another.

Another ethical advice, and one which assumes great importance in the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* later on, is that man must spend his lifetime always in action, specifically the karmas enjoined in the scriptures, in a mood of resignation to His will. Inactivity, according to this Upanishad, would be the canker of the soul.

Finally, the text goes on to say that one who sees all beings in the Self, and sees the Self as existing in all beings, for whom all beings and everything that exists have become the Self, cannot turn away from anything in disgust. How can such a one suffer infatuation? What ground would such a one

have for grief? Aversion, infatuation and grief proceed from an inability to see the Atman in all things. However, one who realizes the oneness of all things, for whom everything has become the Self, ceases to be affected by the common foibles and suffering of humanity.

This book

In 1967–68, during the nine-month Teacher Training Course, Sri Swami Satyananda gave several satsangs on the *Ishavasya Upanishad*, explaining the text verse by verse. This commentary was first published in 1973. In the present edition, the original lectures are being reproduced, along with Sri Swami Sivananda's teachings on the Upanishad.

In his commentary on the *Ishavasya Upanishad*, Swami Satyananda explains the vedantic concepts of the Upanishad in the context of deep yogic insights and his personal experiences in yoga sadhana. He states that by joining the truths of the Upanishads with yoga, knowledge unfolds without confusion. He also states that this Upanishad corrects the overstressing of the path of renunciation in the *Yajur Veda*. Then he widens the notion of karma to include not only the ritual actions prescribed by the vedic authority, but also daily activities concerning family, society and community. Thus he states that karmas expel the animal nature in man, as well as expressing and releasing the samskaras. Furthermore, he interprets the 'darkness' referred to by the Upanishad as the absence of the faculties of consciousness, such as buddhi and mind, as well as being driven to action by instinct alone. He points out that we can correct, formulate and effect the reorientation of the inner personality even while working in the world and by means of conscious and voluntary efforts. He then stresses the need for yoga sadhana and relates in numerous ways the elevated concepts expressed in the Upanishad to the different forms of samadhi and other experiences as described in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali. However, much of the discussion of the higher states of meditation and sadhana indicate that

he is speaking from personal experience, which throws a different light on the mantras of the Upanishad and provides greater depth of understanding than what is presented in the more conventional commentaries.

Swami Sivananda's teachings on *Ishavasya Upanishad* present what is essentially the classical Advaita Vedanta interpretation of the mantras. Thus he introduces the path of *jnananishtha*, one devoted to the knowledge of Brahman, and the path of a *karmanishtha*, one devoted to dutiful karma and service to humanity. The first is reserved for sannyasins and renunciates, and the second is for those unable to take sannyasa due to worldly or societal duties. It is in terms of conventional Advaita Vedantic concepts and supported by quotes from the writings of Adi Shankaracharya that Swami Sivananda elucidates the notions of Atman, vidya and avidya, and *avyakta* and *vyakta upasana* (worship of the manifest and the unmanifest). He also develops the main idea of the Upanishad concerning the need for both renunciation and worship of the unmanifest, and at the same time the performance of dutiful karma and selfless service to humanity, if positive progress on the spiritual path is to be attained.

Shanti mantra: Peace invocation

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

*Om Poornamadah Poornamidam Poornaat Poornamudachyate,
Poornasya Poornamaadaaya Poornamevaavashishyate.
Om Shantih Shantih Shantih*

Anvay

Adah: That (Brahman, the creator); *Poornam*: is full, infinite;
Idam: this (universe, the created); *Poornam*: is full, infinite;
Poornaat: from that full, infinite; *Poornam*: this full, infinite;
Udachyate: emanates; *Poornasya*: of the full, infinite; *Poornam*:
(if) the full, infinite; *Aadaaya*: is taken out; *Poornam*: the full,
infinite; *Eva*: only (yet, still); *Avashishyate*: remains.

Translation

That (Brahman, the creator) is full, this (universe, the created) is full. From the full emanates the full. On taking the full out of the full, the full still remains.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

This chant can also be said as: “This is one and that is one. From one, the one has come. If from the one, you take out one, one alone remains.” The mathematical equation of this mantra would be: one minus one is equal to one. How is this possible? Literally, the word *poorna* means ‘full’ or ‘complete’. Philosophically, *poorna* means ‘infinite’, as nothing else but the infinite can be full. Infinity is something of which the beginning and the end cannot be determined. It is *ananta*, endless, and it is *akhanda*, partless, divisionless, and fractionless.

If you think about the cosmos or this great universe, about which so much has been spoken and yet so much

remains to be known, you will realize that there seems to be two states or forms of existence. One form of existence is that which is visible, called *vyakta*, the manifest form of the universe, which is seen, known, recognized, and can be discovered in the far and near future. The other form of existence, called *avyakta*, is invisible, unmanifest, and unknown to us. So, the universe exists in two forms: *vyakta* and *avyakta*, manifest and unmanifest.

One cosmos or universe is visible. Maybe, in the distant future, scientists will be able to discover many more things about the universe. The endless galaxies of stars, the Milky Way, the hundreds and thousands of solar systems, and our own solar system, which exist millions and billions of light years away from here, constitute our universe. This manifest universe which has materialized in shape, form, pattern and substance, such as Earth, Sun, Moon, Pluto, Neptune, and so on, and which has evolved to a particular stage, is spoken of in this mantra by the word *idam*, which means, 'this manifest universe'.

In addition to this universe, which is visible, recognizable and discoverable, there seems to be another part of the universe, which is *avyakta*, or unmanifest. Indian philosophy makes many references to this aspect of reality, that there ought to be a face to the universe which is unmanifest. Just as when a number of seeds are sown in your garden, a few come up and a few remain down there, so there is another part of the universe, which has not come up, but is still in the bosom of the infinite. That aspect is indicated by the word *adaha*, 'the unmanifest universe'. That unmanifest universe which has not taken shape and is lying hidden in the darkness of nature is infinite, of unlimited dimensions. The cosmos also appears to be infinite.

From that infinite universe, this finite universe has come up. All that we see is the manifest, evolved form of that unmanifest reality, which is yet to evolve. The usual mathematical law prescribes, 'One minus one is equal to zero.' What is already obvious and clear, both to our eyes

and mind, is this manifest universe, which has come out of the unmanifest form of the universe, uniquely supreme in its quality of oneness and singleness, unmatched and unequalled in its true and real unity. Evidently, when we think and talk of the manifest unity of infinite dimensions, which is part and parcel of the unmanifest unity, also of infinite dimensions, it is not a matter of deduction, but purely an issue of manifestation.

However, the meaning of the word ‘infinite’ should be understood more fully. When one says infinite, one postulates something that has no beginning and no end. Therefore, it means that this manifest universe is only an extension of that unmanifest essence or reality of creation. Thus, this mantra says that if this universe is an outcome of manifest prakriti, then the unmanifest remains unaffected, unchanged and unaltered. This is the literal meaning of the mantra. In Vedanta and in the Upanishads, it is maintained that anything you see in the universe is not everything. It is only the immanent aspect of a supreme power.

For a Vedantin, who is a seeker of knowledge, the existence of God cannot be proved and spoken of in terms of theology and mythology. If the God of a bhakta is theriomorphic or anthropomorphic, like the Hindu and Greek gods, then the God of a Vedantin is the manifest and the unmanifest infinite universe. A true Vedantin believes in an infinite, formless, all-pervading and eternal essence of reality. He does not believe in a God who is subject to and conditioned by time and the limitations of the mind. A Vedantin does not believe in a God who is subject to individual visions, fancies and imaginations. The search of a Vedantin starts with the belief that there is an eternal and infinite reality.

There are two methods by which one can know the truth. One method is to go on negating the truth, and the other is to accept the truth as infinite. There have been people who negated the truth in order to know it. They denied the existence of an eternal reality. In the wisdom of the

philosopher Descartes, every negation becomes a positive assertion of reality. The more one denies reality, the more one logically affirms it. To negate the existence of something is one approach. This approach is only for great thinkers and not for cowards. To deny the truth, to deny reality, needs courage and bravery.

People are afraid to deny God as they think that God will punish them. But brave people, who go in search of reality, do not accept God hypothetically. They deny God first, and through the process of negation they begin to understand God, if there is one, in the truest form. Statements made by a few half-baked thinkers do not hypnotize them. They assert, "No, we do not accept anything that is superficial." This view of an atheist is one approach. In Indian philosophy, the meaning of atheism is different from the western idea. In India, atheism is one of the ways to search for reality.

The second approach is to accept that there must be a higher force; otherwise, law and order and a system would not exist. A law that governs the ontological, teleological and cosmological is evident, by observing the timely recurrence of the seasons and witnessing the definite laws in the operation of nature. A few sincere thinkers started the quest for truth, but ultimately they could not arrive at the point that is God, and they got lost in darkness. They went ahead in search of truth and arrived at a certain stage where they began to cry out, "Oh! I am the Truth; I am the Truth." They were lost in the Truth, and they became Truth itself. This is the process and the theme, which the Upanishads have picked up.

Throughout the Upanishads one finds the search for ultimate knowledge and truth, the quest for the eternal, infinite and unchangeable being. The *Ishavasya* is one Upanishad, but there are hundreds more. In all the Upanishads, one finds that God is not accepted in toto. The word 'God' in English and 'Paramatman' in Sanskrit is inadequate. Therefore, Vedantins prefer to use the terms Brahman, Poornam, Advaita and Atman. For it is true that

there cannot be one single God in this universe, and if there is a single God, he cannot be a small or limited God. He must be infinite and eternal. And if he is infinite and eternal, how can our limited and finite mind understand him?

While reading the Upanishads, one may develop scepticism for the time being. One who practises integral yoga, combining karma, bhakti, raja and jnana yogas, easily understands the Upanishads. If one joins the truth of the Upanishads with yoga, knowledge unfolds without any confusion. The *Ishavasya Upanishad* is divided into seven waves. Mantra one is the first wave, mantra two is the second wave, mantra three is the third wave, the fourth wave comprises mantras four to eight, the fifth wave is mantras nine to fourteen, the sixth wave is mantras fifteen to seventeen, and mantra eighteen is the seventh wave.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: In the vedic tradition every Upanishad begins with a peace chant. Each of the Vedas has its own particular peace chants for its Upanishads. These chants are recited at the beginning and at the end of the Upanishad. The oneness of the universe with Brahman is beautifully described in this chant.

Seven Waves
of the Ishavasya
Upanishad

Isha

1: Isha pervades all

ॐ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥ 1 ॥

*Om ishaavaasyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyaam jagat;
Tena tyaktena bhunjeethaa maa gridhah kasyavid dhanam.*

Anvay

Jagatyaam: in this entire universe; *Yat kim cha:* whatever; *Jagat:* which is ever-changing; *Idam sarvam:* all that (is regarded as); *Isha:* of the Lord; *Vaasyam:* the abode, the dwelling place; *Tena:* by Him (the Lord); *Tyaktena:* (whatever is) given; *Bhunjeethaa:* (you) enjoy; *Maa gridhah:* do not covet; *Kasyavid dhanam:* (for) whose indeed is wealth?

Translation

All that exists in this ever-changing universe is the abode of the Lord (in which the Lord resides). Enjoy whatever the Lord gives you. Do not covet, for whose indeed is wealth?

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

In all the books, Isha is explained as the Lord or God. But the word 'isha' is derived from the root *ishan*, which means

‘to rule’, ‘to govern’ or ‘to conduct’. Therefore, *Isha* may be known as the supreme lord, the supreme governor, or the supreme ruler, but not in the context of the Hindu gods. It should be understood as an all-pervading and all-governing essence. The purpose of this mantra is to give proper guidance to misguided thinkers. It says that one should not covet other people’s wealth, and at the same time, one should enjoy life with an attitude of *tyaga*, renunciation. Why? The logical argument is: “Because everything in this universe is pervaded by one *Isha*. There is one unifying, permeating and underlying essence as a common link. It is not different in you and me. There is oneness of reality.” This is a concept advanced by the Upanishad.

To know the reality, there are two paths: the path of yoga and the path of bhoga. The path of yoga goes through renunciation, and the path of bhoga goes through enjoyment of the objects in the world available to the senses. The usual concept is that by practising *tyaga*, or renunciation, one cannot enjoy the things of the world, and if one enjoys the things of the world, it is not possible to practise renunciation. It is believed that the spirit of renunciation and hankering for enjoyment cannot coexist. This has been the conclusive concept of many thinkers. However, in this Upanishad, a clear-cut indication is given that hankering for worldly objects, gratification of sensory desires, and having the spirit of renunciation, side by side, is possible and achievable.

One Sanskrit text mentions, “What is the fun of that yoga, which cannot be practised amidst sensory enjoyments? What is the purpose of bringing a doctor home, if nobody is ill? Why go to a hospital, when one is not sick?” In the same manner, “What is the fun of practising yoga, when one cannot enjoy life?” Yoga is of no use if it cannot be practised while living in the world of sensory objects. Humanity has been led either by great prophets and saints like Buddha and Christ through the path of renunciation, or else the materialistic thinkers of the East and West, like Shukracharya, Brihaspati, Vatsayanana, and the modern

scientists, who have led humanity through the path of worldly enjoyment.

Ancient Indian materialistic thinkers advocated materialistic enjoyments and wrote books on all subjects, including sexology. Shukracharya, Manu and Brihaspati wrote books on economics, astrology and other subjects. They laid stress on the point of worldly enjoyments and suggested spiritual grafting also. It meant a compromise and adjustment with spiritual life. Great prophets, such as Mahavir, Buddha, Zarathustra, Christ, Mohammed and thousands of others, wished to carry people through the narrow lane of renunciation. However, finally, the two paths of pravritti and nivritti were accepted. *Pravritti* is the path of action and enjoyment, and *nivritti* is the path of renunciation. Those who wanted to taste the materialistic pleasures of the world, to gratify their sense hankerings, accepted the path of action, or pravritti. Those who did not want to satisfy the hankerings of the senses advocated and followed the path of renunciation.

As a result, from time immemorial, we find two distinct paths existing even to this day. Either one has to go through the path of renunciation or one has to choose the path of materialistic enjoyment. Probably, it does not strike one, or maybe one does not believe there could be a possibility of blending these twofold paths. In this Upanishad, there is a hint which reveals the possibility of a blending: *Tena tyaktena bhunjeetha* – “Therefore, through renunciation, enjoy what is enjoyable” is the statement. The spirit of renunciation should control enjoyment. Renunciation here does not mean complete extermination of enjoyment; rather, it should be a controlled enjoyment.

One may enjoy family life, property, name, power, position, learning, community, and so on, with a spirit of detachment. To blend pravritti and nivritti together is a difficult task. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is an attempt to point out the possibility of a blending of these two opposite concepts of life. Then, is it possible to lead a life in the world

controlled by the spirit of renunciation? If this can be done, the aim of the Upanishad is achieved. The mantra also says, “Do not covet anybody’s wealth.” This is an instruction given to the disciple at the end of the *Yajur Veda*.

There is an all-pervading essence, which the Upanishad names Isha; however, in reality, it has no name at all. The supreme, underlying, all-pervading reality is nameless, formless, birthless, deathless, casteless, creedless and religionless. In order to introduce that reality, a hypothetical name is given, and that name is Isha. How does Isha pervade all existence? Just as salt mixed with water pervades every drop, just as butter is immanent in every atom of milk, and just as life pervades every cell of the physical body. Life pulsates and flows from the tips of the toenails up to the top of the head, and in the same way, Isha pervades all existence.

There is one cosmic force, permeating the whole universe. This force is not only manifest energy. Much of it still remains unmanifested. A few manifestations are our solar system, our little and insignificant earth, and so on. This force is unpredictable and inexpressible in mathematical language. Even the great scientists have found that behind this energy there seems to be an irresistible and immutable force beyond understanding. With the present dimension of man’s consciousness, the unknown force cannot be apprehended. It is the immutable force, which may be called the Lord of the universe, the essence of the universe. People have named it God. In Sanskrit, it is named Ishwara, and in Islam, Allah.

An ordinary layman, incapable of thinking intellectually, always understands the supreme power as a personal God, like the king of a country. It is a low, insignificant and childish understanding of God. This is why the theory of God has often been exploded. Communism denies God. The subject of the real God is beyond speech. If communism has exploded the idea of God, it has exploded only the childish ideas of God, or the God of ignorant men and women, who do not have an evolved dimension of consciousness. From

early morning until late at night, a man is busy in worldly pursuits and gets no time to think of anything else except his own petty problems of the day. Where does he have the time to think of whether a greater force exists? When has he got the time to ponder over the universal problems like philosophers and scientists? The ordinary man has no time. He only knows how to get down from one train and jump into another. To reach home, he will catch his bus, step in the door, and slip into bed. The next morning he will repeat the same old routine of life.

Ignorant priests of every religion have been misguiding humanity. They have no right to preach about God, unless they have given enough time and thought to finding out the actual state of reality, the actual nature of the universe. Therefore, the onslaughts of communism on God are not because there is or there is not a God. They are because the God that has been put forth needs to be destroyed. The ignorant and misleading concepts of God should be wiped away. The God of Vedanta, of a rishi or a seer, is the supreme essence, the cosmic force, which does not seek your worship and does not want propitiation from you. Such a God can never be destroyed.

When it is said, *Ishavasyam idam sarvam* or “All this is pervaded by Isha”, it does not indicate a God in person. It indicates God as a force. *Satchidananda* is the right name and word to express the attributes of God. The cosmic force has three attributes. Just as the nature of sugar is sweet, of water liquid and of stone solid, in the same way, there are three characteristics of that supreme essence, known as ‘sat-chit-ananda’. What is sat? *Sat* means ‘existence’ or ‘beingness’. No atom of anything in the universe is devoid of cosmic and immutable force. That beingness is everywhere. Sat means ‘that which exists’, that which exists in all three periods of time: past, present and future. It does not ever cease to be.

The opposite of sat is asat. *Asat* means ‘that which is not’, in other words, ‘the non-existent’. In the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:16) it says: *Naasato vidyate bhaavo*

nabhavo vidyate satah. This means: “That which is non-existent does not come into being, and that which is existent never ceases to be.” It is called sat, and is everywhere. Sat is the essence of creation. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* there is a beautiful dialogue between a guru and his disciples, named Uddalaka Aruni and Shvetaketu, respectively:

“Teach me the science of the Supreme Being that is beyond all names and forms. How was the manifestation processed to bring the universe into existence?”

The question was answered by another question: “If you go to the southern shore of the sea and try the water, how will it taste?”

“It will taste salty,” replied Shvetaketu.

“And if you go to the northern shore?”

“The same, salty.”

“And what will be the taste of the water on the eastern and western shores, and at the middle point of the sea?” the guru asked.

“Full of salt,” replied Shvetaketu.

Then the guru said, “Just as salt is all-pervading in the sea, likewise the consciousness is ever-existent in all the forms of the universe.”

That essence of all things and beings is called ‘sat’. In individuals, it is known as atma or the self. Different ornaments are cast from a piece of gold, yet the gold is not lost but continues to exist with a new name and form. Likewise, when this force converts and manifests in the form of suns and stars, it never gets lost; it only acquires new names and forms. Therefore, ‘sat’ means ‘that which is, was and shall never cease to exist’.

What is chit? *Chit* means consciousness, the supreme principle or force, which is conscious. A great scientist has tried to analyze the principle of consciousness, the motivating force. What is the motivating force behind the peculiar behaviour of atoms? What is the force that decides the physical and natural laws? After all, a law does exist. There seems to be a conscious movement behind the

electrons and protons. The laws of physics are simply baffling when they are put to the test of logic. Scholars and scientists have discovered that there seems to be an intelligent agent or principle behind the behaviour of everything in this world, and that intelligent principle behind everything is called 'chit'. Chit is different from 'chitta'. Chit is the cosmic consciousness and *chitta* is the individual consciousness.

The third attribute of the Supreme Being is ananda. What is ananda? *Ananda* means expression, evolution, manifestation, development and springing off. Blossoming of the flowers is ananda. The manifestation of the universe is ananda, or the expression of the Supreme. Thus, sat, chit and ananda are the three characteristics of the Supreme Essence, which is all pervading. Much could be said about that Supreme Being, but that is really a subject for self-enquiry and meditation.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: The first mantra deals with *jñananishtha*. It is addressed to those who struggle for the attainment of *atma jñana*, or the knowledge of Brahman. This is the *nivritti marga* of sannyasins, or the path of renunciation. The word *isha* comes from the verb *ishte*, to rule. It means 'by the Lord', meaning the Lord, Ishvara, rules the whole world. He is the Supreme Ruler. *Vasyam* means to 'be covered' or 'to be inhabited'.

Shankara explains that one should lose the sense of this unreal world upon realizing Brahman, with the idea 'I alone am all this, as being the inner Self of all.' This world of name, form, action and quality (*nama, rupa, kriya* and *guna*) is superimposed upon the Atman, on account of *avidya* or nescience. Therefore, duality has cropped up. There is now the doer, enjoyer, knower, known, seer, seen, subject, object, and so on. He who contemplates on the Self as the Paramatman or pure Brahman will surely renounce the three kinds of desires: son, wealth, name and fame (*putreshana, vitteshana* and *lokeshana*). *Tena tyaktena* means 'by such renunciation'. *Tyaktena* means 'renunciation' and Shankara

uses it as a noun. *Svid* is a participle, which has no meaning. As the world is unreal and the objects in it are worthless, what is the use of coveting another's wealth? Further, you will get the supreme, imperishable wealth of the Atman by self-realization.

Renounce (the desires of) this world. Renounce (the desires of) the other world. Renounce egoism and selfishness; renounce body-idea, *dehadhyasa*; renounce the desire for liberation; renounce renunciation itself, *tyaga abhimana*. Then you will become That, you will be in Itself: *Brahmavit Brahmaiva Bhavati* – “The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman.” Desire for liberation will destroy all earthly desires. You must renounce the desire for liberation also. *Na karmana na prajaya dhanena tyagenaike amrtitvatmanasuh* – “Neither by works, nor by progeny, nor by riches, but by renunciation alone does one attain immortality.”

Action

2: Action is inevitable

कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतुं समाः ।
एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥ २॥

*Kurvanneveha karmaani jijeevishechchhatam samaah;
Evam tvayi naanyathetosti na karma lipyate nare.*

Anvay

Iha: in this world; *Kurvan*: by discharging; *Karmaani*: (one's) duties; *Jijeevishet*: one should desire to live life with zeal; *Shatam samaah*: for a hundred years; *Evam*: by doing this; *Karma*: actions (performed); *Na lipyate*: do not cling; *Tvayi nare*: to you, Oh man; *Na asti*: there is none; *Itah anyathaa*: other way than this.

Translation

One should desire to live life with zeal for a hundred years by engaging in the discharge of one's duties. Actions performed as indicated in this verse do not cling to you, Oh man. This is the way and there is none other than this.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

In the first mantra, the *Ishavasya Upanishad* declares the supreme nature of the truth and states that the whole universe is pervaded by Isha. Thus, everyone should lead a noble life in a philosophical spirit. The second mantra has an optimistic approach and nullifies the pessimistic tendencies of every person. From time immemorial man has always felt that karmas cause samskaras and thereafter rebirth; therefore, let the wise man renounce karmas. Many great religious movements in the past have decried karmas and have shown the path of jnana to their followers. During the vedic period in India, a philosophical and spiritual cult called Avadhoota used to carry the message of renunciation to the doors of working people. Society demanded work in life, and to balance this, the philosophical approach given was renunciation.

When the *Yajur Veda* came into existence, its philosophy flourished and became popular. During that period, people were eager to follow the path of *nivritti* or renunciation of action. They went into the forests to realize the truth. This Upanishad aims to correct the misconceived notions of the people of that time, and it has a message for the people of our time too, by advising, “Let every man wish to live for one hundred years while performing all the duties and karmas in his life.” The word ‘karma’ is used for daily activities, pertaining to family, society and community. People think that for the attainment of *jnana*, higher spiritual stages or final liberation, one should dispense with the karmas. But the *Ishavasya Upanishad* says, “There is no other way except to perform karmas.”

Many philosophical texts maintain that for spiritual illumination, karmas play an important role. They expel the instinctive and the animal nature of man. In the human mind there exists an animal nature in the form of habits, manners, desires, instincts and unconscious tendencies. This animal nature in man can only be expelled through karmas. If spiritual aspirants do not practise karma in this light, the

long-held suppressions will not have proper expression, and the personality will not be integrated. Therefore, karmas are a necessary and integral part of the process of self-illumination.

Generally, one works for the sake of a nation, state, community and family; this is the materialistic belief. Spiritually, the great thinkers believe that karma is the expression of one's nature, especially the lower nature. By doing work for a long time, the accumulated karmas are exhausted and the personality becomes freer to carry on with the higher schemes of spiritual life. Through self-analysis it can be found that karma signifies all actions, not only the simple, daily routine actions or duties. The force of desire motivates karma. Action gives expression to our thoughts, desires and deep-rooted ambitions, which otherwise would remain embedded and dormant in the personality for a long time. If one believes that karma is a block or obstruction to the expression of the divine soul within, it is all the more necessary to get rid of this block.

Some believe that karma is the toxin of eternal life, called *anadi vasana*, the never-ending desires. Anadi vasana is a great barrier in the unfolding of divinity within. Karma is an expression of the dharma of the *indriyas*, the sense organs. Karma is not only physical action. It is not only the actions or movements of the hands, feet, tongue or brain. Behind these actions there must be a series of incidents from the past life, which are coming forth together and expressing themselves in the form of this present action. Who knows what forces lead us to live and act as we do? What are the forces that enable us to understand the lessons of yoga?

Behind the apparent gross and physical personality of the senses and mind, there are samskaras, which express themselves in the form of thoughts, behaviour and actions. Karmas are performed in order to express and release the samskaras; otherwise they remain buried in the depth of the consciousness. A person may try his best to lead a spiritual life or experience the path of meditation, but he will not be

able to progress at his will. It is now clear why the rishi of this Upanishad says to his disciple, "For you, there is no other way than this." Who is that disciple? Surely, he is not an ordinary worldly man, but one who has taken refuge at the feet of the master. The dialogue takes place between the guru and his intimate disciple. Therefore, even for an intelligent, enlightened and aspiring disciple, karmas are essential.

The Upanishad brings us one truth: spiritually illumined people never decry karmas. Though karmas cause frustration, exhaustion, attachment, passion, greed and everything else, even then, they should not be decried. Many sects decry karma, but this Upanishad says, "Do not decry karma." For higher emancipation there is no way other than karma. Dattatreya, the ancient guru, maintained that the path of renunciation is like the flight of a bird capable of soaring high. Only those who have strong wings are able to fly from one mountain peak to another, whereas the path of action is like the path of an ant. It is for those who have no wings and no capacity to fly. For them, the path of karma, which is slow but sure, is prescribed. The path of karma takes time.

The path of karma, however, loses its meaning for those who are free from the fear of death and who do not care for anything of this world. The *nivritti marga*, or the path of renunciation, is the best way for them. Renunciation is for the brave, not for the weak in flesh and mind. People full of desires and subject to ethical, moral, social and physical limitations, should follow *karma marga*, the path of action. Therefore, the Upanishad maintains that karma marga is for the majority of people, while jnana marga is open only to the privileged few.

Karmas do bind a man. When karma is performed, it creates an influence, impression and samskara. These impressions are carried to the subconscious mind in the *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body. From there, they pass on to the *karana sharira*, the causal body, and become *samskaras*, which are the accumulated seeds of actions. These

accumulated actions find expression in this life and other lives of a person, one by one. When karmas play a great part in an individual's life, according to the time, gravity and prominence, they are called *prarabdha* or destined karmas.

Karmas, as a whole, are divided into three categories: (i) *sanchit karma*, (ii) *kriyaman karma* and (iii) *prarabdha karma*. The karmas that are in stock, the accumulated actions, are called *sanchit karmas*. The current karmas that we are creating today are called *kriyaman karmas*. The accumulated karmas that have started bearing fruit in this life, whether sweet, bitter or mixed, are called *prarabdha karmas* or destiny. As an analogy, imagine that a farmer has a seed store. He takes out a few seeds for planting in the appropriate season and harvests the crop in due time. After the harvest, he deposits more seeds in the stock and continues to do so again and again every year.

Karma does indeed bind a man to its fruit. However, the method of exhausting karmas is not *tyaga* and *anasakti*, renunciation and desirelessness. The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that even if you do not do karma physically, your mind will remain active, and that is also karma. Thus, the Upanishad says that it is far better for a common man to wish to live for as long as possible while doing his respective duties. If he thinks that his karmas will bind him, it is not so. There is a special way by which he can be free from the clutches of karma.

In the Upanishads, the concept of karmas is twofold: (i) karmas done for one's own self and (ii) karmas done for others. When karmas are done for the sake of others, they are known as *Brahma karma*, the noble or higher karmas. Higher karmas do not bind a person. Therefore, a person has to do karma in such a way that it does good to others and is also conducive to his own happiness. The usual approach in the world is that whatever one does, it should bring good to him and him alone. Often one does not care whether one's actions are good for others or not.

The upanishadic approach is that one must think in the context of a large number of people. Karmas should bring

benefit to a large community as well as to the individual self. Therefore, karmas that are beneficial to society and to the individual never bind a person. They do not cause accumulation of samskaras or form bad habits. The person who performs such karmas develops no complex of any kind and remains free.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: The first mantra lays down the rule for knowledge. This mantra lays down the rule for action. This mantra gives advice to those who cannot liberate themselves from the bonds of the material world. *Karmanishtha*, dedication to duty, is prescribed here for those who are unable to take up sannyasa. *Kurvanneva* means that it is 'by doing' and not by refraining from action. *Eva* gives definite force. *Karmani* means works enjoined by the Vedas, such as agnihotra and other rites. The omission of these works causes sin.

Jivishet means 'one should wish to live'. *Shatam samah* means 'a hundred years'. This is the longest period of life for a man in the Kali Yuga, the present age. One should wish to live for one hundred years continually involved in dutiful karma and not otherwise. Leading an idle, easy-going life will not do. One should perform religious rites daily and one should do constant, selfless, disinterested service to humanity with a spirit of *atmabhava*, feeling of unity with all. Then only will one attain purity of heart, *chitta shuddhi*. Then only will *atma jnana*, knowledge of the soul, dawn in one's heart. By such performance of work without any motive, one will not be bound to one's work. This is the path of action or *pravritti marga*.

Dark Planes

3: Sunless world of ignorance

असूर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसाऽऽवृताः ।
तांस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः ॥ ३ ॥

*Asooryaa naama te lokaa andhena tamasaa aavritaah;
Taanste pretyaabhigachchhanti ye ke chaatmahano janaah.*

Anvay

Asooryaa: demonical; *Naama*: known; *Lokaa*: existences; *Tè*: they; *Andhena tamasaa*: by blinding darkness; *Aavritaah*: are enveloped; *Ye ke cha*: whosoever; *Aatmahanah*: who do not believe in the Atman; *Janaah*: persons; *Ste*: they; *Pretya*: after the dissolution of their bodies; *Taan*: to those existences; *Abhigachchhanti*: truly depart.

Translation

After the dissolution of their bodies, those persons who do not believe in the Atman depart to demonical planes, enveloped by blinding darkness.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

This mantra has two explanations: the orthodox and the esoteric. There are demonic worlds with blinding darkness

all around. People who commit suicide go to these worlds of blinding darkness after death. This is the orthodox interpretation. Some people who are frustrated in life commit suicide and their souls enter a path of darkness. However, this interpretation seems out of place in the context of this Upanishad, which is solely devoted to the knowledge of the Self. The topic of the soul's journey after committing suicide seems irrelevant here. Therefore, although the interpretation is correct, it is different from the upanishadic interpretation.

Apart from this plane of sense consciousness, where we are able to comprehend objects through the respective sense organs, there are other planes of consciousness also. In yoga, we talk about the higher and subtler planes of consciousness, such as the consciousness of the sukshma and karana sharira, or the consciousness of *bhuloka*, *bhuvaloka*, *swahloka*, *mahaloka*, *janaloka*, *tapaloka* and *satyaloka*, the seven higher worlds or planes of consciousness. These are popularly known as the 'seven heavens', or the seven planes of individual consciousness. By spiritual practices or other methods, an individual soul can be raised to higher states of evolution, and by certain evil acts, a soul can be put down in the abyss of lower consciousness.

There are seven higher and seven lower planes of consciousness. In all, there are fourteen worlds. The seven higher planes belong to the higher spiritual and evolutionary process of consciousness. The seven lower planes belong to the material consciousness. These worlds make up the subtle and the gross planes of consciousness. They are marked by the presence or absence of light and awareness. While going up, there is more and more light, awareness and peace. While coming down to the lower planes, there is the experience of darkness, devoid of awareness. The higher worlds are with light and the lower are without light.

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* uses the word *asurya*, which means the planes of consciousness devoid of sun or light. *Asurya* means 'without sun'; it indicates the absence of the different faculties of consciousness to enlighten the different

objects. The mind is able to enlighten objects, like a book in front of the eyes or the sounds received through the ears. When *buddhi*, the intellect, and the mind throw light, different objects become perceptible to the *indriyas*, the sense organs. In the absence of light from buddhi and the mind, the senses can never perceive any object. Similarly, when consciousness goes to the lower planes, there is an absence of light. The light of buddhi and the mind are not there.

What is the driving force of awareness or consciousness? In Sanskrit, it is called *swabhava*, or one's own innate nature. It is by swabhava that a man sees, hears, acts or does not. In the higher worlds, a person does everything under the full control of consciousness. In the lower worlds, one acts under the compulsion of instinct and the influence of swabhava. There is no sun, which means there is no buddhi or mind. The lower planes of awareness are covered with extraordinary, blinding darkness. One feels no direction there, whether north, south, east or west. Due to extreme darkness, the individual loses the sense of time and place. One experiences this blinding darkness in meditation and in dreams, as well as after death.

The word 'consciousness' opens a different phase of human life. This consciousness, on the one hand, undergoes a process of evolution, and on the other hand, remains the same through all incarnations. In India, we are aware of two paths which the soul follows after death: (i) the path of the devas, called *devayana* (*yana* meaning path) and (ii) the path of the ancestors, called *pitriyana*. In spiritual people, the awareness passes through the path of the devas during meditation and also after death. The path of the devas is full of illumination and light. In persons who are engrossed in material life, the awareness passes through the path of the pitris or ancestors during meditation as well as after death.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also mentions two paths: one goes through the south and the other through the north. One goes through sushumna and the other through ida and pingala. These are all passages of consciousness. Through the passage of sushumna or ida and pingala, the consciousness goes up

and down. Through ida and pingala, it passes through a dark period or a dark night. Therefore, the Upanishad says, "After departure from body, the slayers of the Atman pass through blinding darkness or sunless worlds."

The rishi of this Upanishad feels that a person should either be useful and noble unto himself, or should contribute something good to others. If he does not fulfil his obligations to himself or to society, he has wasted his life. In the Upanishads such a person is called *atmaghati*, 'one who commits suicide'. *Atmaghat* is spiritual suicide. Human life is precious and full of promise. A human body is a rare gift of nature. Only the human mind has the ability to permeate, combine and think about the Creator of the universe. With such tremendous intelligence and capacity, man is made in the image of God Himself. If a man, with all these capacities and faculties at his command, is useful neither to himself nor to others, that is a form of suicide!

What will man do if he is not serving himself or society? He will commit crimes or waste his life in idle thinking and mischievous actions. Such people are *atmahano janah*, the killers of the Self. *Atma* or the Self must either be restored to its original status, where it was before coming down, or the individualized self must ascend. However, if a person neither maintains the original glory of his consciousness nor allows the degenerated consciousness to rise, what will happen? The Self will be annihilated completely, and that is called the destruction of the Self or spiritual suicide of the aspirant. According to the great thinker, Shankaracharya, consciousness should be developed to the superlative degree during wakefulness and in meditation.

When one comes to a certain stage in sadhana, the inner consciousness is changed by conscious and voluntary efforts. The senses and the mind retain their normal spheres of consciousness, but the subconscious and the unconscious spheres of personality are changed. For an aspirant, it is not necessary to evolve through meditation only. He can correct, formulate and affect the reorientation of the inner

personality even while working in the world. Change is taking place all the while within one's own self, without one's knowledge. One thinks hundreds of thoughts at a time, which formulate different channels in the consciousness. A number of times the consciousness goes high and a number of times it comes down to fall in an abyss.

A wise man understands this truth and decides not to waste his life. *Atmahana* in this context means those who waste their lives and the wonderful faculties of the mind. Those who are unable to utilize the talents of mind and buddhi annihilate their own soul. Such people are self-killers. In this light, the paths of jnana and karma should be followed together. Those who do not follow the path of jnana or karma undergo a process of regression. Their consciousness is thrown down to the lower planes of blinding darkness.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: There are two readings: *asurya*, sunless, and *asuraya*, undivine. This means that in comparison with the state of Supreme Self, the most exalted worlds of the gods are also godless. *Andhena tamasa* means 'blind darkness', referring to the ignorance which stands in the way of realizing one's Self. *Avritah* means 'covered'; *pretya* means 'leaving the body'; *abhigachchhanti* means 'attain'. *Atmahanah* means 'slayers of the Atman', those who kill their Self.

Those who draw the veil of ignorance over the Atman are not able to perceive the Self. They move about self-deluded in this world and run after perishable sensual objects. Their minds are filled with passion, greed, wrath, pride and egoism. They do all sorts of evil actions when they are under the influence of lust, greed and anger. They are caught up time and again in the wheel of birth and death. They mistake the perishable body for the imperishable Self. They worship the perishable body, as did Virochana and his followers, the *asuras*, or demons. They have entirely forgotten the glory and splendour of the immortal Atman, which is sat-chit-ananda. Hence they are called *atmahanah*, slayers of the Atman.

The Self is One

4: Omnipresent Self

अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो नैनेवा आप्नुवन्पूर्वमर्षत् ।
तद्भावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत्तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दधाति ॥ 4 ॥

*Anejadekam manaso javeeyo nainaddevaa aapnuvan poorvamarshat;
Taddhaavatonyaananatyeti tishthat tasminnapo maatarishvaa
dadhaati.*

Anvay

Tat: the Self; *Anejat*: unmoving; *Ekam*: is one; *Javeeyah*: is faster; *Manasah*: than the mind; *Poorvam*: the original cause; *Arshat*: knower of all or source of wisdom; *Enat*: to it; *Devah*: even the deities (of the senses); *Na aapnuvan*: cannot reach; *Tat*: it; *Anyaan*: to other, to those; *Dhaavatah*: runners; *Tishthat*: being in its own place; *Atyeti*: reaches out; *Tasmin*: in it; *Maatarishvaa*: all pervading air; *Apah*: water, rain; *Dadhaati*: supports the activities (of the world).

Translation

The Self is one. It is unmoving, yet faster than the mind. Even the deities (of the senses) cannot reach it. It is the original cause and the knower of all. Although stationed in its own place, it reaches out to those that run. It is the all-

pervading air and supports the activities of the world, like water and rain (the karmas and their outcome).

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

The glamorous ritualistic and theological part of the Vedas gives only a glimpse of God and confines the conceptualization of the Supreme Being to finite expressions and definitions. The religions of the world of today and yesterday, including the *Yajur Veda*, sing the praises and glories of God. They pay tribute to the finite expressions of the Divine Being. Sometimes it appears to a layman that God is a man or a finite being who took birth. This kind of illogical, unsystematic and unphilosophical, yet theological, approach to the supreme knowledge creates a lot of confusion about God.

Many who sincerely study the science of yoga are cautious in their belief of God. They have to analyze carefully to ascertain whether what they believe is true, or whether they believe simply because they have been asked and taught to believe by society. Sometimes, nobody teaches us about God and yet we learn of it. Sometimes without knowing much about God, some people profess and preach. Therefore, in order to pursue the path of God-realization, one should be clear that even if one's mind is intellectually unable to have a complete understanding and knowledge of God, one can at least know that 'God is not this', or is not what one was thinking of.

Once, when I was a boy, I had gone to my village in the Himalayan mountains during my vacation. It was a Tuesday and my grandmother had asked me to take flowers and a little oil to the temple and perform pooja.

"What for?" I asked.

"To worship God," she said.

"But I do not believe in that God," I retorted.

"You do not believe in God?" she exclaimed.

"I do believe in God, but not in the God that you believe in," I said.

She did not understand. She thought that her God was the universal God, and this young boy was trying to challenge her God. I said further, "I do not believe in the God you believe in, nor do I want you to believe in the God I believe in."

Even now, I do not say that the God I believe in is the ultimate definition of God. I want to change; therefore, I have always been changing my definition of God, year after year. When I took sannyasa, I had a view, and now I have a different view. This Upanishad is also trying to teach the same idea. The Upanishads do not say what the ultimate reality is. They say what the ultimate experience of reality should be after going through all the processes of ordinary thinking, contemplation and reflection.

The person with an enquiring mind always tries to snatch a little time from materialistic pursuits to dive deep into the mysteries of life. He thinks about death, transmigration, continuity and survival of the soul. The concept of God is realized by dropping away all the sectarian and biased notions. The first mantra tells us that Isha dwells within the whole universe. Now, the fourth mantra tells one to rend asunder the misunderstandings about God, which are prevalent in society. Sometimes the conception of God is so hopeless that a thinking man is apt to laugh at it. One has many childish concepts about God. Such concepts are comparable to children playing in the village with little idols and celebrating their marriage, tea party, processions, and so on.

One is not required to shake off the concept of God that one has in the heart. However, at the same time, one should attempt to further discover the truth, like a free-minded scientist, philosopher or enquirer. One can be an open-minded without closing the doors of the mind. One should try to know more and obtain further enlightenment on the subject. One should not think that a certain concept is the ultimate form of God. All theological sects have closed their doors to further knowledge. Therefore, it is essential to understand the real aspect of the Supreme Being.

Ekam or 'one' is the qualification of the Supreme Purusha. The literal and recognized meaning of *deva* is 'god', but in the Upanishads the word *deva* is often used for the senses. It is derived from the basic root *dyuta*, which means 'to shine' or 'to illumine'. Since the senses are responsible for perception or illumining an object, they are called 'the illumining ones', the devas. The eyes illumine an object and the ears enable us to hear a sound. What is that purusha or atma about which the mantra speaks? Atma is a mysterious and invisible force beyond the conception of the human mind. Therefore, the Upanishads maintain that the devas, or the senses, cannot overtake or comprehend it.

The Atman is far beyond the grasp of the sense perceptions. It is an established truth of philosophy that the higher reality or the cosmic force is not a subject of sense perception. Even yogis who meditate on the Self, with the help of the mind and the senses, find it difficult to comprehend the subtle and infinite truth with the finite sense faculties of perception, which are an imperfect vehicle of knowledge. Philosophers proclaim that the senses have a limit and can function only up to a particular point. Thus, the devas or the senses cannot overtake or reach that Supreme Atma.

The Supreme Being is one, and one denotes infinity. In Buddhist and Hindu scriptures, Lord Buddha and the rishis have tried to avoid the subject of defining the Supreme One. The Upanishads maintain, "The ultimate reality is shoonya." *Shoonya* means zero or a cipher. Zero is a symbol of the infinite and not a symbol of 'no value'. Some thinkers thought the supreme reality should be spoken of as shoonya and not as One. When you say, "God is One", you think of One as the limited one, although it is used only for the infinite One, for One who has no second or third. That One is *advaita*, the non-dual. The Supreme One or Self is swifter than the mind. The Self is not confined to space or a period of time or to a limited condition, while the mind is always conditioned. The Atman or Self is unmoving and stationary, but the mind is subject to change and motion.

The rishi of the Upanishad says, "In this atma, the individual soul places his karma after death." The *sthula sharira* or gross body is buried or burnt or disposed of; however, the *sukshma sharira* or subtle body, composed of five *karmendriyas*, organs of action, five *jnanendriyas*, organs of cognition, five *pranas*, vital airs, four faculties of *antahkarana*, the inner instrument, and one atma, leaves the body. The individual soul, or *atma* is the conscious agency of life. It is unfluctuating, unceasing and constant awareness in all lives. This supreme awareness takes care of the *sukshma sharira*, which is a bundle of karmas and past impressions. That *sukshma sharira* is placed over the causal body, like passengers placed in a bus.

After the destruction of the *annamaya sharira*, body of matter, the *anandamaya sharira*, bliss body, along with the *vijnanamaya sharira*, psychic body, and *manomaya sharira*, mental body, are reduced to the finest form. When all the *koshas*, or bodies, are reduced to the finest form, the awareness of the individual soul, called *jivatma*, places the karma on the *anandamaya kosha*. This process occurs after the death of the physical body. This is the philosophy of transmigration. Thus, the karmas keep on multiplying or becoming less, life after life.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: This mantra describes the nature of the Atman. *Na* and *ejat* make up *anejat*. The root *ejri* means 'to shake'. *Anejat* means 'unagitated', steady. It is motionless, but 'swifter than the mind'. This seems to be an apparent contradiction or paradox, but it is not so. The Atman is all-pervading and all-full (*paripurna*). It is said that the Atman is swifter than the mind. Before the mind reaches a place, the Atman is already there. As it is all-pervading, the mind can never be in advance of it. *Devas* here mean the senses, such as ears, eyes, nose, etc. It is derived from the root *dyu*, which means to illuminate.

Tishtat means 'sitting'; the Atman is *nishkriya*, it keeps quiet. Matarishvan is the ruler of the atmosphere. He is the

divine life-power in all forms. Shankara explains: *Matari antarikshe svayati gachhatiti vayu* – “He who moves in the mother, the air, which is the upholder or sustainer of the whole world, the sutratman, hiranyagarbha, the universal Soul.” *Matarishvan* means air. This air supports the fire, sun, rain, and so on. *Apas* means all karmas or actions. Water stands for action, as all sacrificial acts are performed with water.

5: Moving yet unmoving

तदेजति तन्नैजति तद्दूरे तद्वन्तिके ।
तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः ॥ ५ ॥

Tadejati tannaijati taddoore tadvantike;
Tadantarasya sarvasya tadu sarvasyaasya baahyatah.

Anvay

Tat: that (atman); *Ejati:* moves; *Tat:* that; *Na ejati:* does not move; *Tat:* that; *Doore:* is far away; *Tat:* that; *Antike:* is also nearest; *Tat:* that; *Asya sarvasya:* of this whole world; *Antah:* is present within; *Tat:* that; *Asya sarvasya:* of this whole world; *Baahyatah:* is also outside.

Translation

That (Atman) moves and also does not move. That (Atman) is the farthest and also the nearest. That (Atman) is present within this whole world and is also outside.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

According to this Upanishad, the Self is infinite and beyond the scope of gross perception. The second half of the mantra says that the Atman is inside and outside of all. Being inside of all indicates its power of immanence, and being outside of all signifies its power of transcendence. Certain schools of philosophy believe that the Supreme Reality is all-pervading,

immanent and transcendent. Butter is immanent in milk, but it is not to be found outside of milk, so it has limitations. Salt is immanent in seawater, but is not found outside seawater. Thus, it is only immanent and not transcendent. The Supreme Reality, about which the Upanishad speaks, pervades the manifest and unmanifest universe, and is beyond as well.

A particular line of thought called Pantheism believes that the universe is God. But the Upanishad says that the supreme reality or the supreme consciousness, the Atman or the Paramatman, is not only immanent but also transcendent. This idea is further illustrated in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, through a discussion which takes place in the court of King Janaka between Yajnavalkya and a great brahmin. The brahmin rose up and asked:

“Oh Yajnavalkya, can you tell me how many gods are mentioned in the Vedas?”

“Three thousand, three hundred and thirty-six,” Yajnavalkya replied.

“But tell me, how many gods there are,” the brahmin asked.

“Three hundred and thirty-six,” Yajnavalkya said.

“No, I asked you the exact truth about the number of gods,” the brahmin said again.

“Eight,” Yajnavalkya now replied.

“No, please tell me the actual number of the gods,” the brahmin asked further.

“Three,” Yajnavalkya said.

“Tell me the truth,” the brahmin insisted.

“All right, one-and-a-half,” Yajnavalkya answered.

“Then, if the actual number of gods is one and a half, what are the 3,336?” the brahmin enquired.

“These are all the glories and manifestations,” Yajnavalkya replied.

“What is this one-and-a-half then?” the brahmin asked.

“One is immanent and the half is transcendent,” was Yajnavalkya’s final reply.

This describes the pantheistic philosophy of India in the form of a story. It may not be true mathematically that immanence is one and transcendence is half, as immanence and transcendence are both within the scope of infinity, and infinity is One. To make it more intelligible to the mind of an ordinary person, the Supreme Being, or the Soul, is the pervading force in the *vyakta* and the *avyakta*, the manifest and the unmanifest. There is a force in both the seen and the unseen universe, which is beyond the scope of all. We do not know how much or how great it is. Therefore, the number one-and-a-half is not a mathematical calculation of the supreme. It means that we know only half of the truth about the transcendent One, which is not the Truth as a whole. What is this One? It is our conceptual reality, which we have been able to conceive in both the manifest and the unmanifest universe.

Therefore, this mantra says, “The atman in you is the microcosmic reality, which is immanent and at the same time transcendent.” Even if one is able to know the *vyakta* and the *avyakta*, and claims that he has known Him, it is not correct. One has not known Him, as he is not only that much. Thus, the transcendental aspect of the cosmic being, Brahman or Parabrahman, is indicated in the Upanishad by the word *neti, neti*, or *na-iti, na-iti*, which means ‘not only this much, not only this much’. The transcendental aspect is beyond all dimensions of perception, cognition and knowledge.

The rishis of the *Brihadaranyaka* and other Upanishads have proclaimed that the Supreme Reality has an immanent and all-pervading aspect. Transcendental means that where concept, imagination, experience and even cosmic experience cannot penetrate. In Sanskrit, there is a particular term to understand and explain the transcendental, *paratpara*, which means ‘beyond the beyond’. *Avyakta* is beyond, but the transcendental, or *paratpara*, is beyond the beyond. This particular aspect of the transcendental is beyond all explanations.

Other Upanishads explain it thus: *Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha, anadam Brahmano vidvan na vibhethi*

kutaschaneti. It means, “From where the speech returns along with the mind, not having found Him.” The Upanishads declare that not only the speech, but also the mind cannot penetrate beyond a certain range of knowledge. This is the ultimate statement of all the Upanishads. One can only go as far as the first stage of samadhi, *vitarka samadhi*, through the power of logic and reasoning. Even this is difficult, as only a few can comprehend that reality. Beyond that is the subject of inner experience alone.

Unless one has burnt the samskaras and attained the clear state of nirbeeja samadhi, there is no possibility of maintaining the transcendental state. The ‘live’ samskaras will direct the aspirant either deeper within, to vichara samprajnata samadhi or back out to the external world. The experience of the intermediary asamprajnata stage is like clearing the ground for nirbeeja samadhi. The gardener investigates the remaining seeds or *samskaras*, cultivating those required and discarding the rest, either through sadhana or by manifesting them, that is, working them out in the physical world. *Nirbeeja* is where there are no seeds left.

The transcendental aspect of Supreme Brahman appears to be a great force with three aspects. The first is the manifest universe, the second is the unmanifest and beyond, and the third is ‘beyond the beyond’. There may be a fourth aspect also, about which no one has the least idea. The Upanishad also finds it difficult to speak about the fourth stage of the Supreme Reality, which is absolutely unknowable and unknown. The transcendental reality is a subject of indirect perception, known as *aparokshanubhuti*. This kind of perception does not take place through the senses, but through samadhi. The transcendental experience takes place only in nirvikalpa samadhi. That experience is known as *kaivalya*, or the ‘absolute’.

The immanent aspect of the Supreme Being is subject to conditions, although it is not really conditioned, but only appears to be conditioned. Suppose a train is standing

still and another train is passing by. The passengers in the stationary train think that their train is moving, while those in the moving train think they are standing still. This is called conditioning. Although the first train is not moving, to the passengers it seems to be moving. The passing train is moving, but it appears to those inside that the train is standing still. One comes across these experiences every day. There is another example. When you ride on a merry-go-round, after some time you feel that the whole world is revolving. This is called relative conditioning. In the same manner, the aspect of the Supreme Consciousness, which is immanent, untainted, untouched and *param pavitra*, holy and sacred, appears to be subject to the motion of the body, mind and senses. Similarly, when the body dies, it appears that the soul dies, although the soul does not die due to its immanence.

Another story will illustrate this. Two birds were sitting on a tree, one at the top and the other near the bottom. The bird at the top of the tree sat quietly observing, while the bird below went on eating the fruits, finding them tasty and delicious. When the fruits of one tree were finished, the bird sitting below would fly off to another tree. The bird sitting at the top of the tree also followed. The next tree was also full of delicious fruits, which the bird sitting below found and enjoyed, and afterwards flew off to a third tree. The bird sitting quietly at the top followed. The bird below found the fruits of the first and second trees sweet, but the fruits of the third tree were bitter. So, it spat them all out and went on to the fourth tree, where it found sweet and bitter fruits. The bird eating below asked the bird at the top to also share in the enjoyment and suffering of the sweet and bitter fruits. However, the bird sitting above would not eat, but only continued following the lower bird. Ultimately, the bird sitting below had eaten so many fruits that it vomited and fell down in a faint. At that moment a hunter appeared at the base of the tree. He saw the other bird sitting quietly at the top of the tree, and immediately shot it down.

In this parable the birds sitting on the tree represent the two aspects of the Supreme Being, the manifest and the immanent. The immanent aspect of the Supreme Being does not suffer, but appears as if it also undergoes suffering, as it follows the lower bodies, like the upper bird followed the lower bird. Similarly, the atma does not die, but it appears to die. Therefore, the Supreme Atma is only apparently subject to the conditions of the body, mind and senses. As far as the transcendental aspect of reality is concerned, there is no doubt that it is beyond all suffering. When the spiritual aspirant or the yogi withdraws his mind from the objective universe and looks within to perceive the immanent soul, he goes into samadhi and experiences the transcendental reality. Then he is able to transcend the conditions of time and space.

Thus, the immanent and transcendental aspects of reality are spoken of in this mantra. At the same time, it is said that the immanent aspect of reality is subject to time and space. It appears that it is moving, and it appears that it is not moving at all. There is a tradition in the Upanishads and in Vedanta, that any prominent or important idea will be repeated twice. For instance, *Ya evam veda; ya evam veda*, which indicates that the statement they have made is a very important one.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: The ideas of the fourth mantra are continued here. *Ejati* means ‘moves’; *aijati* means ‘does not move’. This mantra may seem full of contradictions and paradoxes to the ordinary person, but the meaning is quite clear to the thinker. The Atman is the *primum-mobile*, the prime mover. It gives a push to Prakriti and Prakriti moves. The Atman is motionless by itself, but makes Prakriti move by merely gazing; its simple presence is enough. Thus it is said that ‘it moves’. Yet, when the Atman is all-pervading and all-full, where can it move to? Hence it is motionless, ‘it moves not’.

The Atman is distant for those who are immersed in worldliness, who have plunged into *samsara*. It is far for

those who are passionate, proud, selfish, egoistic and hot-tempered. However, it is near for the enquirer, and very near for those who have *chitta shuddhi*, purity of mind, and the four means of salvation: *viveka*, discrimination; *vairagya*, non-attachment; *shat sampat*, six virtues; and *mumukshutva*, desire for liberation. The Atman is nearest for those who practise *shravana*, hearing; *manana*, reflecting; and *nididhyasana*, meditating, at the feet of the guru, as it is their own inner Self or *antaratman*.

This Atman is *ati-sukshma*, very subtle, and transcends *akasha*, ether. It fills and covers everything, so it is *paripurna*, all-full. Hence it is within and without. 'All' means 'all the objects of this whole world'. Brahman is the *adhishtana*, substratum or support of all beings, as it is inside and pervades all existence.

6: Seeing one in all

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥ 6 ॥

Yastu sarvaani bhootaani aatmanyevaanupashyati;
sarva bhooteshu chaatmaanam tato na vijugupsate.

Anvay

Yah tu: whosoever; *Sarvaani bhootaani*: all beings; *Atmani eva*: in his own Atman or Self; *Anupashyati*: beholds, sees; *Cha*: and; *Sarva bhooteshu*: in all beings; *Aatmaanam*: his own Atman or Self; *Tatah*: by virtue of that perception; *Na vijugupsate*: does not feel revulsion (for any being).

Translation

He, who sees all beings in his own Atman, and recognizes his own Atman in all beings, by virtue of that, he feels no revulsion for any being.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

Atma jnana, or the knowledge of the Self, is not a process of thinking alone, although jnana yogis employ the process of *manan* and *chintan*, thinking and contemplation. The Upanishad maintains that when one is immersed in spiritual awareness, during the state of samadhi or atma jnana, the intellectual process of equating the outside world within the Self is not possible. In the sphere of higher consciousness there is only awareness of the Self. A siddha or a yogi, having attained that stage, sees everything within himself. The experience is similar to the cosmic vision of Arjuna on the battlefield. For a moment the physical veil was removed by the spiritual power of Sri Krishna, the preceptor. As a result, Arjuna saw within himself the entire cosmos, its creation and destruction. This was the microcosmic realization of the macrocosmos, and it happened within the twinkling of an eye.

Thus it is said, “As in the microcosmos, so in the macrocosmos.” Microscopic processes, physical or supraphysical, are exactly the same as they are in the macrocosmos. Just as there is space outside, there is intramolecular space within the structure of the atom also. Mathematical similarities and equations are found in atoms. In the view of eminent scientists, the outside space exists within the framework of the atoms. In the same manner, the ancient scriptures say: *Yatha Brahmande tatha pindande* – “As in the macrocosmos, so it is in the body also.” Within the body and without the body, there is a vast field of awareness. In that vast field of awareness, the entire macrocosmos exists in microscopic form.

At a certain point, the spiritual seeker attains a particular vision. There is the vision, the awareness of *virat swaroopa*, the cosmic form. Usually, in jnana yoga the process of atma jnana is approached by a system of reasoning, logical argument and contemplation. Here the nature of the Atman is investigated through the mind, intellect and pure reasoning. The Upanishad mentions clearly that once in the higher sphere the aspirant should see the vision of the whole

cosmos. The practitioner attains this vision during deep meditation. The yogi, who has seen the whole creation in its miniature form in the deep state of meditation, will also see this projection of his higher consciousness within all beings in the world outside. When he comes out of meditation, he will feel as if he is pervading all beings in a miniature form.

This may be difficult to understand, as we have never attempted to reach the Supreme Being through an appropriate process. Most spiritual aspirants are engaged in understanding the Supreme Reality only through the process of intellect, and the Upanishad says that this Atman is unattainable by the intellect. The supreme consciousness cannot be attained through weak will or by sharp intellect, not by hearing about it from reliable sources, or by reading about it. The higher state of consciousness can be sought only by one process, the continued process of meditation. In meditation the Self is able to project itself, and therefore a seer does not hate: *Tato na vijugupsate*. When a great yogi is able to project his higher consciousness in all beings, there is no shrinking away in the form of hate or dislike.

Why does the consciousness of a realized man not shrink? There are two processes: the recession and expansion of consciousness. It is also known as the ascent and descent of kundalini. During the process of ascent, the extended external consciousness shrinks and becomes one-pointed. At that point the entire universe is seen in the form of a vision. The vision is of the miniature world within one's own self. When the centralized and one-pointed consciousness starts expanding again, it is called the descent of kundalini, or the descent of power. In kundalini yoga, the ascent of kundalini is from mooladhara to sahasrara, and the descent is from sahasrara to mooladhara. When the kundalini awakens, it ascends to sahasrara and meets Shiva. There it drinks nectar and sheds poison. Then the poison-free kundalini descends to mooladhara, the earthly plane of consciousness, full of *amrita*, nectar. This brings spiritual attainment and expansion of power.

When the one-pointed and unified consciousness expands, it is known as *param chetana*. It expands like love, increasing every moment, and this expansion can be felt everywhere. In the embrace of that expanding consciousness, the yogi accepts everything without exception, and makes no distinction in any creature. Therefore, he does not hate anyone. His consciousness never shrinks, but remains ever expanded. This sense is conveyed in the words 'na vijugupsate'. Such a jnani or realized person is above social canons, as they are not eternal canons or eternal dharma. The receding consciousness goes deep from dharana to dhyana, and from dhyana through the four stages of samadhi: vitarka, vichara, ananda and asmita, which are all a part of sabeeja or samprajnata samadhi, and culminates in nirbeeja samadhi. When the consciousness recedes to the ultimate point, one sees the whole cosmos in miniature form. When one has seen the cosmic form of Purusha, the Creator, one's spiritual consciousness starts expanding again, like ice melting back into water once more.

In this mantra, the Atman is equated to asmita samprajnata samadhi. The Atman is not a personal being nor is it a philosophical principle. The Atman neither has attributes nor is it without attributes. It is consciousness at its highest state, where the *beeja*, the seed, or the samskaras are about to be shed. The dynamism of individual consciousness still remains, however, as individuality is not yet finished. The highest point of consciousness in man is called Atman. When you sit alone and want to think of the Atman, do not think of it as something in the heart or head or leg or in any part of the body. It is a state of consciousness, beyond the body, mind and senses. One can reach that state of consciousness, but it is not a person or a being. It is not a point, a process or an object of knowledge. It is the semi-final point of *chitta vritti nirodha*.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: The thoughts of this mantra are also found in two slokas

of the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:29–30): “The Self, harmonized by yoga, sees the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; everywhere he sees the same.” And, “He who sees Me everywhere, and sees everything in Me, of him I never lose hold, and he shall never lose hold of Me.” In the shrutis you will also find, “He who sees the Supreme Self as pervading all, and everything in the Supreme Self, does not wish to guard himself, as he has no fear from anyone. Being fearless, he is never anxious about preserving his little self.”

In mantras six and seven, the state of a jnani, who has experienced full self-realization, is described. *Sarvani bhutani* ordinarily means ‘all creatures’. Literally it means ‘all things that have come into being’ right from the *avyakta*, unmanifest, down to the immovable objects. The Atman is the common consciousness for all beings. The Atman is common in the king and the peasant, the saint and rogue, the cobbler and the barber, the ant and the elephant, the tree and the stone. The sage who has realized this Atman, beholds that all objects and beings are not separate from his own Self, and that his Atman is the Atman of all. How can that great soul, who is resting in his own Atman, who has such an exalted cosmic consciousness, shrink from any being or object with a feeling of revulsion? How can he dislike anything? How can he hate anybody? This would be absolutely impossible!

7: Unity of the Self

यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।
तत्र को मोहः कः शोकः एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥ 7॥

*Yasmin sarvaani bhootaanyaatmaivaabhoodvijaanatah;
Tatra ko mohah kah shokah ekatvamanupashyatah.*

Anvay

Yasmin: to the person; *Vijaanatah*: who is the knower; *Sarvaani bhootani*: all beings; *Aatma eva abhoot*: become one with his own Self; *Tatra*: there, in that situation; *Ekatvam anupashyatah*: to the person who constantly perceives the unity; *Kah mohah*: what delusion (remains); *Kah shokah*: what sorrow (remains).

Translation

To the person, who is the knower, all beings are one with his own Self. In that person, who constantly perceives the unity, what delusion and what sorrow remain?

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

The consciousness has two stages of movement. The first stage is unification of consciousness. The second stage is expansion of consciousness. When the consciousness of a realized sadhaka or sage is expanded and envelops everything of this world, he no longer remains immersed in samadhi. The expanded consciousness flows even during the normal period of his life. He then lives like a drunken person, whose inebriation continues, even after the initial intoxicated state. The Upanishad points out the difference between an ordinary person and a great sage. An ordinary person identifies with the world and the sense objects. The sage lives and acts in the world through his higher consciousness. The expanded consciousness of a sage functions overwhelmingly through the body and the

senses, without *raga* and *dvesha*, like and dislike, and without attachment.

The jivanmukta is definitely able to work through the body and the senses, in the world and for the world, without attachment. Logically, it may seem difficult, but there is a technique to bring the higher consciousness down to the lower plane of the senses, and yet retain its original nature. The light of higher consciousness does not descend upon the earth like sunbeams. There is a special method by which a sadhaka can bring down that consciousness from heaven to earth, from the higher state of samadhi to the lower level of sensory and objective perception. The Upanishad says that once the unity is established and the aspirant is successful in bringing the higher consciousness down to the earthly level, he can no longer be struck by grief and delusion.

People are adversely affected by grief and delusion only when they are not attuned with the higher consciousness, and are unable to bring the higher consciousness down to the level of earth. The cause for delusion and grief is *avidya*, ignorance, and *dwaita*, the sense of duality. Delusion and grief take place in the lower self, when the individual is moving in the world of the senses. Once one learns to transcend the planes of normal consciousness, one blossoms into the higher spheres of consciousness and the evaluation of delusion and grief is completely changed. Great sages are capable of bringing the higher or supramental power down to earth, which then manifests in their work. They are never struck by delusion and grief, though they continue to move in the world of duality amidst likes and dislikes.

A jnani or a yogi has to live in this world, which is continually influenced by the pairs of opposites. On this account, one can never be completely happy in this material world. If one is materially happy, one is mentally unhappy. If one is mentally happy, one is materially unhappy. One way or the other, something or the other makes one sorrowful and causes delusion in our day-to-day life. Therefore, *moha* and *shoka*, delusion and grief, follow the individual wherever

he goes like a shadow. In any incarnation, high or low, rich or poor, sophisticated or unsophisticated, literate or illiterate, educated or uneducated, not a single soul has ever been free from moha and shoka.

The only way to be free from grief and delusion is jnana yoga, not viveka. Delusion, the eternal state of confusion and grief, is a mental state that can only be removed by developing one's consciousness to a high degree. The supernatural power is not going to descend on earth, like the rays of the sun, a rain shower or a rainbow. The descent of the higher power is internal, not an external, supernatural event. It takes place within you and is expressed through your actions.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: This mantra further explains the idea expressed in mantra six. Both the words *vijanata*, or the knower, in mantra seven and *anupashyati*, or to see, in mantra six, have the same significance. Mere intellectual assent that the one Self abides in all beings will not do. Actual self-realization or direct perception, *aparoksha anubhuti*, is an indispensable requisite. In mantra seven it is said that the knower transcends delusion and sorrow. These are the fruits of attaining Brahmajnana.

Tarati sokam atmavit – “The knower of Atman crosses over grief”, is the emphatic declaration of the shrutis. The three *granthis*, or knots, are *avidya*, ignorance; *kama*, desire; and *karma*, action. A worldly man is drowned in delusion and sorrow on account of these three knots. When these knots are destroyed in the knower of the Atman by seeing the unity or oneness, by realizing that all the *bhootas*, elements, are one with the Atman, how can there be delusion and grief? It is absolutely impossible! He who knows always rejoices in the bliss of the Atman. He stands adamant and even the heaviest sorrow cannot shake him a bit. The *Bhagavad Gita* says: *Yasmin sthito na duhkkena gurunapi vichalyate* – “Wherein established, he is not shaken even by heavy sorrow.”

8: Atman is ever pure

स पर्यगाच्छुक्रमकायमव्रणमस्नाविरं शुद्धमपापविद्धम् ।
कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयम्भूर्याथातथ्यतोऽर्थान्व्यदधाच्छाश्वतीभ्यः
समाभ्यः ॥ ८ ॥

*Sa paryagaachchhukramakaayamavranamasnaaviram shuddha-
mapaapaviddham;*

*Kavirmaneeshee paribhooh svayambhooryaathaataathyatorthaan
vyadadhaachchhaashvateebhyah samaabhyah.*

Anvay

Sah: he, (the Atman); *Paryagaat:* pervaded all; *Shukram:* the bright; *Akaayam:* without body; *Avranam:* flawless; *Asnaaviram:* without sinews; *Shuddham:* pure; *Apapaviddham:* untainted by sin; *Kavi:* wise; *Maneeshee:* omniscient; *Paribhooh:* all-encompassing; *Svayambhooh:* self-born; *Shaashvateebhyah samaabhyah:* since eternal times; *Yaathaataathyatah:* according to their nature and karma; *Arthaan:* things; *Vyadadhaat:* he has duly distributed.

Translation

He (the Atman) is all-pervading, radiant, flawless, without any body, subtle or gross, pure and untouched by evil. He is the seer, omniscient, all-encompassing and self-born. Since eternity He has duly distributed to all things their respective functions, according to their nature and karma.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

This mantra describes the experience of the Atman in samadhi. It is a description advanced by a negative approach, saying 'not this'. The higher consciousness of samadhi is all-pervading, immanent in all spheres of consciousness, namely annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya, vijnanamaya and anandamaya. The experience of supreme consciousness is always luminous, never dark. The Atman

should not be mistaken for a man or a holy being. The text of this Upanishad declares that it is *akayam* or bodiless. The physical body is not the body of the Atman, as the Atman has no body. It is *avranam*, unscarred and flawless. It has no fat and muscle. It is not smoky, but bright and pure.

The Atman is only consciousness. When the pure consciousness emerges, the lower consciousness of the senses disappears. Thus, it is called *shuddham*, as not even an iota of lower consciousness is mixed with it. Memories and manipulations of lower physical and mental life do not pierce into the highest consciousness. Grief, sorrow, evil and pain do not reach there. The most important and supreme aspect of the Atman is the state of wisdom. It is a state of omniscience and transcendence. It is impossible to comprehend this state while living and working in the sensory universe. It is, therefore, often said that the Atman is not a subject for discussion.

The Atman is also self-born. This power in man is the microcosmic, universal Self, responsible for allotting, fixing, giving or distributing the respective functions to all. Since eternity, this consciousness has been working through birth and death. Everything functions in perfect order due to that consciousness which resides in the body. It directs all functions of life, destiny, action, thought, emotion, and so on. The individual is not guided by the mind, buddhi or gunas alone. Finally, everything is guided by the Supreme Self, which is beyond the concept of earthly consciousness. This is the *swaroopa*, or form, of that Atman.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: Sah means 'the Atman described above'. Paryagat means 'gone abroad or went around'. The real meaning is 'The Atman is all-pervading'. Shukram means 'pure or brilliant'. Akayam means 'without a body'. Here it means that the Atman has no subtle body or linga sharira. The terms avranam and asnaviram denote that the Atman has no gross physical body. The term shuddha, or pure, indicates that

the Atman has no causal body and that he is free from the impurity of ignorance. *Apapaviddham* means that the Atman is not affected by good and bad actions (*nirlipta*, *asanga*, *asakta*).

Shankara takes the subject to be the Self and explains the neuter adjectives as masculine, as the beginning *sah* and the ending *kavih* are masculine. *Kavih* means a seer who has direct vision and illumination. *Manishi* means 'lord of the mind', 'prompting the mind'. *Paribhu* means 'being above all'. The Atman is the best of all. *Svayambhu* means 'self-existent'. The Atman never depends upon another. The 'years' here mean *prajapatis*, or creators.

Vidya and Avidya

9: Vidya and avidya

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽविद्यामुपासते ।
ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायाँ रताः ॥९॥

*Andham tamah pravishanti ye avidyaamupaasate;
tato bhooya iva te tamo ya u vidyaayaam rataah.*

Anvay

Ye: those; Avidyaam: to ignorance; Upaasate: worship; Andham tamah: blinding darkness; Pravishanti: enter into; Ye: those; Vidyaayaam: to knowledge; Rataah: are devoted; Te: they; Tatah u bhuyah iva: still greater; Tamah: darkness (enter into).

Translation

Those who worship *avidya* (ignorance) enter into darkness and those who worship *vidya* (knowledge) enter into still greater darkness.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

A new wave of thought begins with this mantra. The Vedas maintain that by karma, ritualistic or selfless action, one can attain peace and higher spheres of spiritual life. Other thinkers state that by meditation alone one can attain the

higher spheres of consciousness. But the rishi of this mantra announces that neither by meditation alone nor by karma alone can one attain the light. Those who follow the path of karma alone miss the luminous sphere of life, and those who attempt to go only through meditation, disregarding karma, also miss the light. The term *avidya* here refers to ‘ritualistic karma’, and *vidya* means ‘spiritual light’. Elsewhere, *avidya* means absence of knowledge or that knowledge pertaining to worldly objects, and *vidya* means that knowledge pertaining to the Supreme.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* gives a definition of both *vidya* and *avidya* in detail. According to this text, *vidya* is that process of learning which enables us to know the imperishable, the spiritual consciousness, and *avidya* means knowledge of the world. To follow *avidya* means to follow the path of karma in relation to objects of the world, society, community and life. It should not be equated with ignorance, though usually this word is used for absence of knowledge or ignorance. *Vidya* is really the path of meditation, but it is interpreted as knowledge. The meaning of *vid* is ‘to know the truth’. In the Upanishads, the word *vidya* is used for meditation, and in different Upanishads different systems of meditation are prescribed, such as:

- *Udagitha vidya*: meditation of *Om*
- *Panchagni vidya*: meditation of five fires
- *Madhu vidya*: meditation of the essence
- *Asvamedha vidya*: meditation of horse sacrifice
- *Shandilya vidya*: meditation of Shandilya
- *Prana vidya*: meditation of prana.

During the Buddhist period, the word *vidya* was also used for the system of meditation. Buddha often said, “I have practised all the *vidyas*,” meaning he had practised all kinds of meditations. Thus, *vidya* means to engage oneself in meditation, and *avidya* means to follow the path of karma. How do we know that *avidya* is karma and *vidya* is meditation? There are evidences and explanations of this in the Upanishads. It is often maintained in these scriptures

that those given to the pleasures of life are blind to the inner reality. They are like fools who work in the world, but do not know what they are working for. Such people are said to be followers of the path of avidya. When one is conscious of one's inner spiritual being, one is called *vidyayam* or *vidyam*, and one who is not aware of the inner spiritual being is called *avidyam*.

This mantra says that those who follow the path of karma alone, either with selfish or unselfish motives, with charitable or exploiting tendencies, enter into blinding darkness. This means that if a spiritual aspirant only follows the path of karma, his inner spiritual personality and awareness enter into a deep unconscious state, and no evolution of personality or awareness takes place. The lot of those who practise only meditation and not karma is also pitiable. The mantra says that in the case of those who practise only meditation and do not exercise their physical body or perform action, the consciousness enters into a deeper realm of darkness. As a result, when they sit in meditation, they are unable to illumine their soul. The luminous nature of their consciousness remains unexpressed. There is darkness within, just as there is lack of expression without.

Many believe that karma yoga is the ultimate yoga, which evolves the soul and helps it to reach the highest dimension. Others maintain that evolution is possible through meditation alone. This mantra refutes these beliefs, and says that both vidya and avidya have limitations, and due to these, the soul enters into the dark planes of existence.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: Avidya here means 'karmas' or vedic rites, such as agnihotra, etc., that are performed with expectation of fruits. Those who perform such karmas enter into blinding darkness. They obtain the abode of the ancestors or pitriloka, and are hurled back down to mrityuloka, the earthly realm, when the fruits of their karmas are exhausted. Vidya here means 'spiritual light', that is, the knowledge of the devas,

or luminous beings, by which *devaloka*, realm of the gods, is attained. When the fruits of the worship of vidya are exhausted, those sadhakas who have abandoned karmas and seek the knowledge of deities also come back to this samsara, and fall into still greater darkness. Karma and vidya bear different fruits when each is done separately. A combination of karma and vidya is recommended in this verse.

10: Walking two paths

अन्यदेवाहुर्विद्ययाऽन्यदाहुर्विद्यया ।
इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचक्षिरे ॥ 10 ॥

Anyadevaahurvidyayaanyadaahuravidyayaa;
Iti shushruma dheeraanaam ye nastadvichachakshire.

Anvay

Vidyayaa: of knowledge; *Anyat eva*: different fruit; *Aahuh*: they say; *Avidyayaa*: of ignorance; *Anyat*: different fruit; *Aahuh*: they say; *Iti*: thus; *Dheeraanaam*: from the wise; *Shushruma*: we have heard; *Ye*: who; *Nah*: to us; *Tat*: that subject; *Vichachakshire*: have expounded.

Translation

The result of vidya, they say, is distinct and so is the result of avidya. Thus we have heard from the wise, who have expounded this subject to us.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

The rishi of the mantra says that we have heard this great truth from the wise ones of the past about the different results achieved by *vidya* and *avidya*, meditation and karma. 'In the past we have heard' means that there must be some previous reference to this statement in the Vedas. The *Yajur Veda* is the second Veda in order; therefore, the earlier reference is either in the *Rig Veda* or the *Yajur Veda* itself.

The advantages and disadvantages of vidya and avidya are different. By vidya one is able to develop the introverted state of mind. Through avidya one develops capacities of the mind, intellect and senses. Those who only develop the introverted states of mind are unable to live successfully in the world of matter and facts, and those who engage themselves in karma alone are unable to discover their inner self. Thus there are certain advantages and disadvantages in each of these two paths. The advantage of vidya, or meditation, is the discovery of the inner self, and its disadvantage is the inability to live and adjust in life as an expert. The advantage of avidya, or karma, is the development of expertise and intellectual capacities, and its disadvantage is total unawareness of the spiritual nature. In the context of death, by karma, the consciousness of man goes through *chandra marga*, the lunar path. Through meditation, it follows *surya marga*, the solar path. The *Bhagavad Gita* and several other texts maintain this view.

The *Rig Veda* says that by karma one develops *aham* or I-ness. As a result, the senses are nourished and the mind accumulates more samskaras. Through the path of meditation one is able to transcend the mind, senses and ego, and cross over the realm of darkness. There is no way other than this. The *Yajur Veda* mentions that the paths of karma and meditation are both different. Those who are full of desires and ambitions go through the path of avidya, which is called *pravritti marga*, the path of action and enjoyment. The other path of vidya or meditation is called *nivritti marga*, which is a luminous path. This path is for those who do not care for the life of the senses and disregard worldly objects.

The path of karma precedes dhyana. Those who practise vidya or dhyana before perfecting karma enter into psychic darkness or darkness of the inner self. Many aspirants who have not completed the path of karma, or avidya, in this life or in previous lives, cannot proceed even an inch on the path of spiritual life. Many sannyasins practise meditation for

twenty years or more, but cannot cross the realm of darkness. The karmas must be exhausted first in order to overcome the darkness and suspension of consciousness in meditation.

Karma means prosperity in the materialistic context. Karmas in life, whether good or bad, are processes of perfection. The Upanishad says that you travel one road by vidya, and another road by avidya. Vidya bestows introversion, and avidya gives extroversion. One leads inside, and the other leads outside. One makes your tendencies objective, the other subjective. One gives tension and the other peace and tranquillity. At the same time, both lead one to darkness, but dhyana leads the spiritual aspirant to a psychic state of darkness, which is difficult to overcome.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: Anyat means 'something distinct'. By the worship of vidya, devaloka, or the world of gods, is attained. By avidya, or karmas, the abode of the manes, pitris or forefathers, is attained. This is the view or opinion of the spiritual teachers, who have taught us paths of both knowledge and karma. This teaching has been handed down from guru to disciple.

11: From death to immortality

विद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।
अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ 11 ॥

*Vidyaam chaavidyaam cha yatatadvedobhayam saha;
Avidyayaa mrityum teertvaa vidyayaamritamashnute.*

Anvay

Yah: he who; Tat ubhayam: both of them; Vidyaam: knowledge; Cha: and; Avidyaam: ignorance; Cha saha: simultaneously; Veda: knows (he); Avidyayaa: through ignorance; Mrityum: death; Teertvaa: having crossed; Vidyayaa: by knowledge; Amritam: immortality; Ashnute: attains.

Translation

He, who knows both vidya and avidya together, crosses death through avidya and attains eternal life through vidya.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

Those who know *karma* and *dhyana*, action and meditation, and practise them both together do not enter into the path of darkness. They cross over death due to their practice of avidya, and enjoy immortality due to their practice of vidya. By following the path of both vidya and avidya, something strange happens; the individual crosses over death. What is this death that is spoken about? Death is the dark passage in the realm of the personality, the barrier between the conscious and super-conscious life. The river that flows between two realms, the realm where we are and the realm beyond, is the river of death. The realm of absolute unconsciousness is the realm of death.

In Hindu mythology only one person can cross that river of death, and he is known as Yama. People wrongly interpret Yama as the god of death, but I call him the all-pervading and all-powerful spiritual consciousness of man. The 'river' is known as Vaitarani, which is also misunderstood, even by Hindus. They think that the soul crosses a particular river after death, but the whole idea is misconceived. Death here does not mean physical death, but the complete dissolution of consciousness. This state of consciousness is very difficult to pass through. The doer of good actions, the performer of *tapas* or hard penance, the person who has lived a spiritual life, alone is able to cross this river of consciousness, where all the dimensions of consciousness are dissolved. This state of consciousness is called *mrityu*, death. It does not mean the death of the physical body. As long as one remains in this physical body, he is aware of everything. However, the moment the soul is out of the physical body, the consciousness dissolves until it is born again in a new body.

The state of dissolution of consciousness is called *mrityu*, which may be explained in two ways. Firstly, it is the death

of the physical body, in that the awareness is withdrawn from the physical dimension to the innermost centre, which may be anahata or any chakra in the body. The awareness is withdrawn, as if it were sucked up, from all the parts of the body and concentrated at a particular point within. This is a kind of death to the world of the mind and senses, so it is true to say that by avidya one crosses death. Secondly, by karmas one exhausts samskaras, and the accumulated karmas, known as *karmashaya*, are destroyed. When the storehouse of karmas is absolutely empty, and the awareness is passing through the unconscious state, there will be no difficulty in crossing the river of death or unconsciousness. Only a man of ignorance or avidya will find it difficult to go beyond that river. If samskaras are annihilated, it is easy for the spiritual aspirant to go through the states of dhyana and samadhi.

What is amritam? It is a state beyond mortality. Some call it turiya; others call it samadhi, self-realization or God-realization. This Upanishad calls it *amritam*, which means 'no death'. It is the refraction of consciousness. It is a state where consciousness revives again, but in a different dimension. These states are achieved in meditation, and not outside. In meditation one goes through different phases of awareness, according to one's capacity. One who has no karmas, desires, ambition, or fear of losing anything, will cross that realm of death easily. When his awareness revives again, he will enjoy immortality. Amritam means 'immortality'; it is a state where the soul goes beyond death.

Therefore, the mantra states that karma and meditation should be practised side by side. One should neither postpone meditation for karma, nor karma for meditation. In the personality there appears to be some grossness. In the subtle dimension of consciousness there appears to be some gravity or rigidity. This grossness of the personality makes it impossible for a sadhaka to go beyond the realm of darkness, before actually working out the samskaras in life. This mantra is an important guide to spiritual life. One can

understand that karma and dhyana are both necessary and go together. There should be a happy blending of the two. A synthesis between the two paths of karma and dhyana, a compromise between extroversion and introversion, is necessary in life.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: Mrityu or death here refers to 'work and worldly knowledge', in the sense that these lead to mortality or death. Tirtva means 'having crossed over'. Ashnute means 'attains'. To have communication with the deities is amritam or 'immortality'.

Sakara and Nirakara

12: Worship of sakara and nirakara

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येसंभूतिमुपासते ।
ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ संभूत्याँ रताः ॥ 12॥

*Andham tamah pravishanti ye asambhootimupaasate;
Tato bhooya iva te tamo ya u sambhootyaam rataah.*

Anvay

Ye: those people who; *Asambhootim*: unmanifest, not born of another; *Upaasate*: worship (they); *Andham tamah*: into blinding darkness; *Pravishanti*: enter (and); *Ye*: those who; *Sambhootyaam*: in the manifest; *Rataah*: take delight; *Te*: they; *U*: however; *Bhooya iva*: greater; *Tatah*: than them; *Tamah*: darkness they enter.

Translation

Those who worship the unmanifest (in the state of dhyana) enter into blinding darkness. However, those who take delight in the manifest enter into still greater darkness.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

In this mantra, the rishi says that those who worship *asambhuti*, or the unmanifest, enter into blinding darkness.

And those who worship *sambhuti*, or the manifest, enter into even greater realms of darkness. What are the unmanifest and the manifest that are spoken of here? They refer to the unmanifest consciousness and the manifest consciousness. When the mind has something subjective or objective to dwell upon, it is manifest consciousness. Meditation on any concrete object comes under the *sambhuti* category. When the mind has nothing subjective or objective to dwell upon, it is unmanifest consciousness. Meditation on the formless or unmanifest consciousness comes under the *asambhuti* category.

Yoga has two paths of meditation: one is *sakara*, meditation on a concrete object, and the other is *nirakara* meditation, on the formless consciousness. *Sakara* and *nirakara* are the two stages in meditation. When the consciousness has an object for support, it is known as *sambhuti*, or manifest consciousness. In *sakara* meditation one can meditate on any object, which has a form, like a *chakra* or *yantra*. Sound is *sambhuti*, as it is manifest in the form of vibration. A thought is also a manifest form of the mind. The inner sound in *nada yoga* is a manifest form, even though it is imperceptible to the senses. Psychic movement is also a manifest form of consciousness. All things perceptible to the senses or intelligible to the mind come under manifest consciousness. They may have a gross or subtle form, like the vibrations of music or sound.

What is *asambhuti*, or the unmanifest? During meditation, when everything disappears and certain inner symbols are seen, that is the experience of the unmanifest. The conscious and subconscious symbols belong to the manifest consciousness, and the symbols of the unconscious belong to the unmanifest. Meditation on sleep and the experience of sleep as a form of consciousness is a meditation on the unmanifest. Thus, all the experiences pertaining to the unconscious state belong to *asambhuti*, the unmanifest consciousness, and the experiences of the subjective and objective experiences of the world that we are able

to perceive through the mind and the senses belong to sambhuti, the manifest consciousness.

The Upanishad says that those who meditate on the unmanifest state of consciousness experience a state of blinding darkness. They do not find light, as the unmanifest state is a purely spatial dimension with no external association. It is described as a deep, dark space, where a total absence of light, cognition and knowledge is experienced. Therefore, many teachers prohibit their disciples from meditating on asambhuti. The Upanishad further states that those who take delight in the manifest enter into still greater darkness. The darkness spoken of here relates to the covering of *avidya* or ignorance, which is due to the external and internal associations that condition the manifest consciousness. This darkness of the manifest consciousness is even greater than the blinding darkness of the unmanifest, as here the awareness is totally identified in the ideas of name and form, and has forgotten its essential or real nature.

A mantra in the *Rig Veda* says: *Ekam sat vipraha bahudha vadanti indram varunam matrishvanam ahuhu*, which means: “The ultimate truth is One, but *vipraha* (those who know) talk about it differently; some say he is Indra, others say Varuna, yet others say Matarishvan.” Along these lines, the *Yajur Veda* also says, “Look around you in every direction; look to the east, west, north and south. Look within you, as far as you can see. Look into the human beings, look into the forests, look into the animals and other creatures, and you will find there is only one essence in all existence.” This one essence in all beings and in all forms of existence is the unmanifest or asambhuti, whereas the multitude of beings and forms of existence are the manifest, or sambhuti.

In the vedic period, pantheism was very popular. Pantheism migrated from India to different countries of the world. The symbols of the Atlantis civilization are well known. From this mantra we understand that for beginners, idol worship or meditation on a conscious symbol is

essential, yet one should not forget to conceive within oneself the unmanifest state of consciousness. Yoga has presented a synthesis of thought in this regard. There is no harm in practising both sakara and nirakara meditation. Spiritual evolution is a great task and responsibility. To expound a thought is not for the sake of the thought itself, but for the sake of the spiritual evolution of the individual. Everyone has to evolve spiritually; therefore, it is essential to practise meditation on the manifest and on the unmanifest.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: Asambhutih is the uncreated nature, which is not sambhutih, born of another. It is that nature which has no cause. It is avyakta or avyakrita, the unmanifest nature, where the three gunas, qualities, exist in a state of equilibrium: guna samya avastha. Matter, energy and the different kinds of sounds exist in an undifferentiated state, which is the cause of all. The whole world exists in a seed state in the unmanifest Prakriti. This worship is known as avyakta upasana. Avyakta is also ignorance. It contains the seed of all desires and karmas. Hiranyagarbha is sambhuti or karya Brahman, born of avyakta. It is the effect of the unmanifest Prakriti. A beautiful interpretation of verses 12–14 is given by Dr Paul Deussen:

*Into dense darkness he enters,
Who has conceived becoming to be naught.
Into yet denser darkness, enters he
Who has conceived becoming to be aught.
Different is it from coming into being,
Different also from not coming into being.
Thus have we received
The doctrine from the ancient seers
One who knows (as non-existent)
Both becoming and not-becoming
Passes through both, beyond death,
And attains immortality.*

13: Results of sakara and nirakara

अन्यदेवाहुः संभवादन्यदाहुरसंभवात् ।
इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचक्षिरे ॥ 13 ॥

*Anyadevaahuh sambhavaadanyadaahurasambhavaat;
Iti shushruma dheeraanaam ye nastadvichachakshire.*

Anvay

Sambhavaat: from the manifest; *Anyat eva*: another type of fruit; *Aahuh*: is told (and); *Asambhavaat*: from the unmanifest; *Anyat*: another type of fruit; *Aahuh*: is told (they say); *Iti*: like this; *Dheeraanaam*: from the wise; *Shushruma*: has been heard; *Ye*: who; *Nah*: to us; *Tat*: that; *Vichachakshire*: have expounded.

Translation

From (worship) of the manifest, one type of result is told, and from the unmanifest another type of result is told. Thus have we heard from the wise, who have expounded that (knowledge) to us.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

In the *Yoga Sutras* (1:19) it is said: *Bhava-pratyayo videha-prakritilayaanaa*, which means: “The videha and prakritilaya yogis have birth as the cause of asamprajnata samadhi.” *Bhava-pratyayah* means ‘birth is the cause’; *videha* means ‘disembodied yogis’; *prakritilayaanaam* means ‘embodied yogis, who are merged into prakriti’. Sage Patanjali further states (1:20–22): “Others attain samadhi by faith, strong will, memory and a higher form of intelligence, derived from samprajnata samadhi. Through these methods samadhi is attained sooner or later, according to the intensity of application and urge.”

Some people reach the state of samadhi very easily, although they have not practised any sadhana, as they have all the traces of their past karma from birth. Thus,

there are examples of persons going beyond the barriers of lower consciousness at a very young age. The great saints Jnaneshwara and Ramana Maharshi of Arunachala both attained samadhi in their teens. Sage Patanjali says that the two types of yogis, who are disembodied and embodied, attain asamprajnata samadhi right from birth. They do not have to practise any preliminary stages, like dharana or dhyana.

Those who meditate on the unconscious, or the unmanifest consciousness (*asambhuti*), develop the prakritilaya consciousness. As a result, they are deeply immersed in nothingness, and remain unaware of the world outside. They come in touch with the reservoir of knowledge within, but when they come out, they remember nothing of what they have seen. However, at certain times in life, they become excited and speak out about what they have seen within. In India, such persons are called *olia sadhus*. Most of the time they are calm and reserved, but at certain moments they speak out about the mysteries of life. This is the result of meditation on the unmanifest. However, it also has the disadvantage of losing touch with the higher consciousness. The meditator goes to the unconscious realm and comes back, but ultimately the contact with this dimension is lost.

In meditation on the manifest, this problem is avoided, as the awareness is fixed on a symbol, either gross or subtle. The symbol forms the *pratyaya* or content of the mind. At this stage, the aspirant must have a basis for the mind in order to hold the awareness intact. By concentration on the form of awareness, the distractions of mind are eliminated and the *siddhis*, or psychic powers arise. However, the disadvantage is that the *pratyaya*, or content of mind, prevents the meditator from attaining the unmanifest state. This is the central theme of the discussion on sakara and nirakara, meditation on the manifest and the unmanifest. Both have their advantages and disadvantages and the Upanishad says that 'this is what they have heard from the wise in the past'.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: He who worships the manifest or hiranyagarbha (karya Brahman) obtains *anima*, the state of becoming like an atom, and other siddhis. He who worships the unmanifest gets absorption, or *laya*. He becomes a prakritilaya (*Yoga Sutras*, 1:19). Thus we have heard from the wise preceptors, who taught us about the fruits of the worship of the manifest and the unmanifest separately.

14: Unmanifest and manifest

संभूतिं च विनाशं च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।
विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा संभूत्याऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ 14॥

*Sambhootim cha vinaasham cha yastadvedobhayam saha;
vinaashena mrityum teertvaa sambhootyaamritamashnute.*

Anvay

Yah: he who; *Tat ubhayam*: both; *Sambhootim*: unmanifest nature; *Cha*: and; *Vinaasham cha*: manifest nature or; *Saha*: together; *Veda*: knows (he); *Vinaashena*: through the destructible; *Mrityum*: to death; *Teertvaa*: after overcoming; *Sambhootyaa*: through the unmanifest nature; *Amritam*: eternal life; *Ashnute*: obtains.

Translation

He who knows both the unmanifest nature and the manifest nature together, overcomes death through the unmanifest nature and obtains eternal life through the manifest.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

In this mantra the word *sambhuti* is used in the sense of the primordial nature, the unmanifest Prakriti or the impersonal aspect of God, while *vinasha* represents the manifest or personal God. The aspirant or yogi who practises meditation on both the impersonal, or *nirakara*, and the personal,

or *sakara*, God transcends the states of awareness and unawareness, and realizes the Supreme Consciousness, which is eternal. The mind needs a *pratyaya*, or content, to focus upon during meditation; otherwise, it is led into darkness. There should be a symbol on which to base meditation. A yogi should clearly realize that all forms belong to the realms of maya. In meditation, anything seen or felt, like a vision, experience, sensation of electrical flow, or heat in the chakras, belongs to maya, or the manifest consciousness. Sooner or later, according to one's evolution on the path of meditation, these forms have to be transcended.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, it mentions that to introvert the mind and overcome the obstacles on the path of meditation, one must have a form for the consciousness to dwell upon. It helps to cut off the connection with the objects of the outside world. Ultimately, the form is also dropped, and the formless manifests. The formless is not to be introduced; it develops spontaneously. The Upanishad accepts the limitations of meditation on a concrete object, like a chakra, devi, devata, symbol, mantra or yantra, even if there be *ekatattwa*, continuous awareness of the one object or principle.

The practice of yoga has two aspects: the *sadhana* and the *sadhya*. The *sadhana* is the means and the *sadhya* is the end. Meditation on a concrete object is *sadhana*. The end or purpose of meditation is *sadhya*. The purpose of meditation is not to attain samadhi; it is to introvert the mind and remove the obstacles. When meditation on one tattwa continues, the obstacles or difficulties do not hinder you, as the mind is able to overcome them. In this Upanishad, the rishi points out the limitations of each method, and also the importance. The limitation of meditation on a personal God is darkness. The limitation of meditation on an impersonal God is still more darkness.

The merit of meditation on a personal God in the form of a symbol is that one is able to cross that realm of darkness, which is called *mrityu*, or death, due to the awareness of the symbol. The symbol may be *Om*, music, a form of Devi, or

a luminous star. Awareness of a symbol carries one through the dark passage. If the awareness is lost, one gets lost in darkness. By meditation on the impersonal God, or the Supreme Purusha, one obtains immortality, the highest state of consciousness, which is ever abiding during meditation and samadhi.

Sometimes, however, the spiritual teachers mislead the students by asking them to do abstract meditation when they are not ready for it. Or sometimes they influence their students to avoid meditation on a concrete object by advocating the philosophy of nirakara. The gross consciousness cannot appreciate or comprehend the fine and subtle principles of Truth. Therefore, *satya* or the ultimate Truth should be understood in two forms. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, "The Truth has a twofold manifestation: one is with form and the other is without form." Form and formlessness are both manifestations of the same Truth or reality.

The refinement of consciousness enables one to comprehend the Truth in meditation. If the mind is pure and subtle, the ultimate form of Truth becomes clear. Thus, meditation on both the concrete and the abstract should be accepted and practised. There are some sadhakas who do not need to meditate on a concrete object. They may have been yogis in their previous lives, where they finished the course of meditation on the manifest Brahman, and by virtue of that, they are born with an evolved consciousness. If such a sadhaka or yogi is compelled to go through meditation on concrete objects, he will become confused or disinterested.

Therefore, a guru is required to know where the evolution of a spiritual sadhaka stands, and whether he needs sakara or nirakara upasana. Suppose a mental patient comes for meditation, the teacher must give him a practice that is suitable for his condition. If he starts meditating on an abstract idea, he will not succeed, as his consciousness needs a solid support. A gross idea or form is necessary for such persons.

In three earlier mantras of the Upanishad, it was decided that neither dhyana nor karma alone is sufficient; one should practise both. The next three mantras maintain that neither meditation on sakara nor nirakara alone will lead one to the highest goal. However, he who considers the personal and impersonal God as One is able to attain the highest spiritual state.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: Here the word *sambhuti* is an aphasis for *asambhuti*. The taking away of a letter or syllable at the beginning of a word is aphasis. The letter 'a' in *asambhuti* is taken away. Thus, *sambhuti* really means *asambhuti*. *Vinasha* means *hiranyagarbha*, the cosmic womb. The abstract is used here for the concrete. 'Death' here means limited powers, desires and vices. By the worship of *hiranyagarbha*, one gets *aishvarya* or *siddhis*, psychic attainments. 'Immortality' here means absorption into Prakriti. The desirability of combining the worship of *hiranyagarbha* and the unborn Prakriti is mentioned in this verse, just as the desirability of combining the worship of *avidya* and *vidya* is declared in verse 11.

Final Prayers

15: Golden lid

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।
तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥ 15 ॥

*Hiranmayena paatrena satyasyaapihitam mukham;
tattvam pooshannapaavrinu satyadharmaaya drishtaye.*

Anvay

Pooshan: Oh Sun, nourisher or sustainer of life; *Satyasya mukham:* face of Truth; *Hiranmayena paatrena:* by a golden disc or lid; *Apihitam:* is covered; *Satya dharmaaya:* seeker of truth; *drishtaye:* for the sight of; *Tat:* that lid; *Tvam apaavrinu:* remove, open.

Translation

A golden disc covers the face of Truth. Oh Sun, remove that lid for the sight of this seeker of Truth.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

The main teaching of the Upanishad has been covered in mantras 1 to 14; mantras 15 to 18 are prayers. This mantra is a prayer in the form of a collection of exclamations, revelations and self-experiences. When the rishi crossed the

barrier of death and darkness, he saw something. What was that? He explains the process of self-experience. He sees the light called *Pushan*, the Sun, which is far beyond the realm of darkness. He says that the face of Truth is covered by a golden lid, or enveloped in a golden vessel. What is that vessel? It is known as *hiranyagarbha*, the golden egg. Within the folds of the golden egg is the experience of the Supreme Purusha, consciousness.

This prayer is not the kind directed towards God. Rather, it is the experience of the rishi who has attained the highest stage of meditation. He says, “I see the face of the Truth, which is the highest consciousness, enveloped in a golden vessel.” A deep study of Vedanta or a deep understanding of the Vedas is necessary to know the nature of this vessel. In the Bible, there is a similar reference to the light. Moses, the great prophet of the Hebrews, saw the light, and in front of it was a golden vessel. It is a symbolic experience. The golden vessel is the veil of consciousness.

The Supreme Consciousness is hidden by some kind of consciousness. The golden vessel is not of the metal gold. During moments of deep meditation, when the rishis went beyond the region of darkness, they saw something like a golden pot. Thus, it was understood that a golden vessel covers the Truth. This is a particular experience in meditation, when the last barrier of maya is crossed. In order to remove the lid of the vessel, the deity of light is to be invoked. Here the Sun is not the sun of the sky, but the light of realization. For the aspirants of yoga, the Sun and Moon are two great forces of the deeper realms of consciousness.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: Hiranmayena means ‘full of light’, ‘effulgent’ or ‘golden’. Patrena means ‘by a disc or lid’. The phrase ‘golden disc’ refers to the solar orb. Satyasya refers to the Brahman, which is inside the orb of the Sun. Apihitam means ‘covered’. Mukham means ‘face’. Apavrinu means ‘open’. Satyadharmaya means those who have been worshipping satya or the Truth

(Brahman) or who have been practising satya, or virtue, in accordance with the injunctions of the scriptures. *Pushan* means ‘the nourisher’ and is another name for the deity Sun. The meaning of the sloka can be understood as follows: “O Pushan (fosterer or nourisher), remove the veil from Thy face that I may see Thee, that I may have self-realization; I, who am a follower of satyadharma, constantly meditate on Thee, the satya.”

16: Overwhelming light

पूषन्नेकर्षे यम सूर्य प्राजापत्य व्यूहरश्मीन्समूह ।
तेजो यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि
योऽसावसौ पुरुषः सोऽहमस्मि ॥ 16॥

*Pooshannekarshe yama soorya prajaapatya vyooharashmeen
samooha;*

*Tejo yatte roopam kalyaanatamam tatte pashyaami yasaavasau
purushah sohamasmi.*

Anvay

Pooshan: Oh Nourisher; *Ekarshe:* Oh sole Seer; *Yama:* Oh ordainer of Truth; *Soorya:* Oh illuminating Sun; *Praajaapatya:* Oh offspring of Prajapati; *Rashmeen:* rays; *Vyooha:* diffuse; *Tejah:* light; *Samooha:* gather; *Yat:* what; *Te:* thy; *Kalyaanatamam:* most auspicious; *Roopam:* form; *Tat:* that; *Tè:* thy; *Pashyaami:* I may behold; *Yah:* who; *Asau:* this; *Asau purushah:* this pure consciousness; *Sah:* He; *Aham asmi:* I am.

Translation

Oh Nourisher! Oh sole Seer! Oh Ordainer of Truth! Oh illuminating Sun! Oh son of Prajapati! Diffuse your rays and gather up your light, that I may behold your most auspicious form. Who is this Purusha, this (pure consciousness within)? I am He.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

This is the utterance of a rishi in a very high state of spiritual experience. It is not possible to reproduce the exact sentences that Moses, Mohammed, Christ or Buddha uttered in their states of ecstasy. However, when they saw the light, they did not want it. They said, “No, take away the light; we cannot bear it!” This is exactly what happened to Arjuna, as stated in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. When Sri Krishna showed the vision of his Cosmic Self to Arjuna, he was overwhelmed by it and said: “Please take this vision away; I do not want it. It is so terrifying, so awesome, so frightening; I cannot endure it. I want to see you in your human form, as you were before.” Similarly, many Sufi and Hindu saints who reached the highest state of consciousness, were unable to bear it and wished to come back down to the lower plane.

All the invocations used in this mantra to Pushan, Ekarshe, Yama, and the son of Prajapati, are made with the request to disperse their rays of light, so that the rishi is able to see the Truth. It was not possible for him to bear the blazing light. He, therefore, asks them to withdraw their brilliance, so that the glare is removed and the Truth is revealed. Then he will be able to see the auspicious form of the Supreme Purusha. What is this form? Nobody knows. It is not the form that we are capable of seeing at our level of consciousness. In order to see the face of Truth, to experience the Supreme Consciousness, or Purusha, the blazing light or the intense glare should be removed.

What is that light? Those rays of the Sun represent the experiences that take place before the attainment of the highest consciousness. This is an experience of transcendence, from the lower plane of consciousness to the superconscious plane, which has occurred in the lives of many great people. They all experienced the light of thousands of suns, and were unable to bear it. This great light seems to be an obstacle in beholding the supreme experience of the highest consciousness. On the highest

plane of consciousness the rishi exclaims, “Who is this Purusha that is within? I am He.” It means that the highest consciousness which is behind the light; That I am.

At this stage it seems that the idea of *dwaita*, or duality, and the notion of ‘I’ and ‘my God’ are totally transcended. At this moment the little or individual consciousness becomes one with the Cosmic Consciousness, losing its separate identity completely. Just as a drop of water that mixes with the ocean gets lost and can retain no separate identity, the individual consciousness at this stage is completely liberated from the traces of maya, and becomes One in experience with the Supreme. At that time, the difference between the meditator, the meditation and the object of meditation is completely annihilated.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: This mantra does not give a description of the nature of the knowledge of the Self. It is the prayer of a person who has transcended the ego. *Pushan* is in the vocative case and it means ‘Oh Sun!’ The Sun nourishes the world, so he is called Pushan. *Ekarshi* means ‘one who travels alone’. *Sohamasmi*, here the identity of *jiva*, the individual soul, and Brahman is established. *Purusha* is he who pervades everything and occupies the city of Brahman, the body.

17: Transcendence

वायुरनिलममृतमथेदं भस्मान्तं शरीरम् ।
ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर ॥ 17 ॥

*Vaayuranilamamritamathedam bhasmaantam shareeram;
Om krato smara kritam smara krato smara kritam smara.*

Anvay

Atha: let; *Vaayuh:* life-force; *Amritam:* immortal; *Anilam:* prana; *Idam shareeram:* this body; *Bhasmaantam:* be reduced to ashes; *Om krato:* Oh Intelligence! *Smara:* remember; *Kritam:* my deeds; *Smara:* remember; *Krato smara kritam smara:* Oh Mind! Remember my deeds.

Translation

May this life-force merge with the immortal prana; may this body be reduced to ashes. Oh Intelligence! Remember my deeds. Remember, Oh Intelligence, what has been done.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

In this mantra, the rishi is speaking from a state of unconsciousness. At one stage, he says, “Let the vayu, the individual prana, merge in the universal prana!” It means, let the individual become One with the whole. Let this body be reduced to ashes. Then he remembers the Atma, who is the doer of all actions in the body. The commentators on this Upanishad have said that this seems to be the utterance of a rishi in the highest state of samadhi.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: The dying man, who has led a virtuous life, who has done good works, gets bliss in the next world by remembering his actions. Thus, he says: “Let my prana leave this body and join the all-pervading sutratman.” *Krato* is vocative case and means ‘Oh mind!’ *Uvata*, in

his commentary, holds that Agni, or fire, who has been worshipped in youth and manhood, is here invoked in the form of mind, or that *kratu* here means 'sacrificial fire'. "Remember! Remember my deeds. Remember all the karmas which I have done from childhood." The repetition of the same words *krato smara* denotes anxiety or uneasiness of mind.

The Good Path

18: Prayer to Agni

अग्ने नय सुपथा राये अस्मान्विश्वानि देव वयुनानि विद्वान् ।
युयोध्यस्मज्जुहुराणमेनो भूयिष्ठां ते नम उक्तिं विधेम ॥ 18॥

*Agne naya supathaa raaye asmaanvishvaani deva vayunaani
vidvaan;
yuyodhyasmajjuhuraanameno bhooyishthaam te nama uktim
vidhema.*

Anvay

Agne: Oh Agni! *Asmaan:* to us; *Raaye:* to prosperity, wealth; *Supathaa:* through uttaraayan, the auspicious path of perception; *Naya:* lead; *Deva:* Oh God! *Vishvaani:* all; *Vayunaani:* actions, ways; *Vidvaan:* knower; *Asmat:* our; *Juhuraanam:* crookedness, deceit; *Enah:* sin; *Yuyodhi:* remove; *Te:* to you; *Bhooyishthaam:* repeatedly; *Nama uktim:* salutations; *Vidhema:* we offer.

Translation

Oh Agni! Lead us to prosperity along the auspicious path. Oh God! You are the knower of all our actions. Please remove the sins of our crookedness and deceit. We repeatedly offer salutations to you.

Commentary by Swami Satyananda

‘Oh Agni’ means ‘Oh dynamic consciousness’. It is dynamic as it leads the sadhaka through the different states of consciousness by the practice of dharana, dhyana and samadhi. When a sadhaka is in the unconscious, he is led by the dynamic consciousness of samskaras, and that is Agni. This path through which Agni, the dynamic consciousness, leads the sadhaka is an auspicious and prosperous path. It leads to wealth. What is this wealth? It is spiritual wealth. Again, it is stated here that the degradation of sin should be removed, which means eradication of the eternal desire or *anadi vasana*. The eternal craving of the soul is ‘to exist or to be’.

On this teaching Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh has said: The rishi here requests Agni to take him by the auspicious path, that is, by the northern route, *uttarayana* or *devayana*, from where there is no return. This is the path of *archis*, light. *Naya* means ‘lead’; *supatha* means ‘by the auspicious path’. *Raye* means the wealth of spiritual bliss, of the Self or of liberation. *Vishvani* means ‘all’. *Deva* means ‘God’. *Vayunaani* means thoughts, knowledge or efforts for salvation. *Vidvan* is ‘knowing’. *Yuyodhi* means ‘destroy’. *Asmat* means ‘from us’. *Juhuranam* is ‘degrading, crooked’. *Enah* means ‘sin’.

Appendices

Sanskrit Text

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

1. ॐ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥
2. कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतुं समाः ।
एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥
3. असूर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसाऽऽवृताः ।
ता स्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः ॥
4. अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो नैनेवा आप्नुवन्पूर्वमर्षत् ।
तद्भावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत्तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दधाति ॥
5. तदेजति तन्नैजति तद्दूरे तद्वन्तिके ।
तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः ॥
6. यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥
7. यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।
तत्र को मोहः कः शोकः एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥

8. स पर्यगाच्छुक्रमकायमव्रणमस्नाविरँ शुद्धमपापविद्धम् ।
कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयमभूर्याथातथ्यतोऽर्थान्वयदधाच्छाश्वतीभ्यः
समाभ्यः ॥
9. अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽविद्यामुपासते ।
ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायाँ रताः ॥
10. अन्यदेवाहुर्विद्ययाऽन्यदाहुरविद्यया ।
इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचक्षिरे ॥
11. विद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तद्वेदोभयँ सह ।
अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते ॥
12. अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येसंभूतिमुपासते ।
ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ संभूत्याँ रताः ॥
13. अन्यदेवाहुः संभवादन्यदाहुरसंभवात् ।
इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचक्षिरे ॥
14. संभूतिं च विनाशं च यस्तद्वेदोभयँ सह ।
विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा संभूत्याऽमृतमश्नुते ॥
15. हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।
तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥
16. पूषन्नेकर्षे यम सूर्य प्राजापत्य व्यूहरश्मीन्समूह ।
तेजो यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि
योऽसावसौ पुरुषः सोऽहमस्मि ॥
17. वायुरनिलममृतमथेदं भस्मान्तँ शरीरम् ।
ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतँ स्मर क्रतो स्मर कृतँ स्मर ॥
18. अग्ने नय सुपथा राये अस्मान्विश्वानि देव वयुनानि विद्वान् ।
युयोध्यस्मज्जुहुराणमेनो भूयिष्ठां ते नम उक्तिं विधेम ॥

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

Translation

Shanti Mantra

That (Brahman, the creator) is full, this (universe, the created) is full. From the full emanates the full. On taking the full out of the full, the full still remains.

1. All that exists in this ever-changing universe is the abode of the Lord (in which the Lord resides). Enjoy whatever the Lord gives you. Do not covet, for whose indeed is wealth?
2. One should desire to live life with zeal for a hundred years by engaging in the discharge of one's duties. Actions performed as indicated in this verse do not cling to you, Oh man. This is the way and there is none other than this.
3. After the dissolution of their bodies, those persons who do not believe in the Atman depart to demonical planes, enveloped by blinding darkness.
4. The Self is one. It is unmoving, yet faster than the mind. Even the deities (of the senses) cannot reach it. It is the original cause and the knower of all. Although stationed in its own place, it reaches out to those that run. It is the all-pervading air and supports the activities of the world, like water and rain (the karmas and actions).

5. That (Atman) moves and also does not move. That (Atman) is the farthest and also the nearest. That (Atman) is present within this whole world and is also outside.
6. He, who sees all beings in his own Atman, and recognizes his own Atman in all beings, by virtue of that, he feels no revulsion for any being.
7. To the person, who is the knower, all beings are one with his own Self. In that person, who constantly perceives the unity, what delusion and what sorrow remain?
8. He (the Atman) is all-pervading, radiant, flawless, without any body, subtle or gross, pure and untouched by evil. He is the seer, omniscient, all-encompassing and self-born. Since eternity He has duly distributed to all things their respective functions, according to their nature and karma.
9. Those who worship *avidya* (ignorance) enter into darkness and those who worship *vidya* (knowledge) enter into still greater darkness.
10. The result of vidya, they say, is distinct and so is the result of avidya. Thus we have heard from the wise, who have expounded this subject to us.
11. He, who knows both vidya and avidya together, crosses death through avidya and attains eternal life through vidya.
12. Those who worship the unmanifest (in the state of dhyana) enter into blinding darkness. However, those who take delight in the manifest enter into still greater darkness.
13. From (worship) of the manifest, one type of result is told, and from the unmanifest another type of result is told.

Thus have we heard from the wise, who have expounded that (knowledge) to us.

14. He who knows both the unmanifest nature and the manifest nature together, overcomes death through the unmanifest nature and obtains eternal life through the manifest.
15. A golden disc covers the face of Truth. Oh Sun, remove that lid for the sight of this seeker of Truth.
16. Oh Nourisher! Oh sole Seer! Oh Ordainer of Truth! Oh illuminating Sun! Oh son of Prajapati! Diffuse your rays and gather up your light, that I may behold your most auspicious form. Who is this Purusha, this (pure consciousness within)? I am He.
17. May this life-force merge with the immortal prana; may this body be reduced to ashes. Oh Intelligence! Remember my deeds. Remember, Oh Intelligence, what has been done.
18. Oh Agni! Lead us to prosperity along the auspicious path. Oh God! You are the knower of all our actions. Please remove the sins of our crookedness and deceit. We repeatedly offer salutations to you.

Shanti Mantra

That (Brahman, the creator) is full, this (universe, the created) is full. From the full emanates the full. On taking the full out of the full, the full still remains.

Swami Satyananda was born in Almora (Uttaranchal) in 1923. Drawn to spiritual life from an early age, he left home at the age of eighteen, and in 1943 surrendered himself to Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh who initiated him into Dashnami sannyasa in 1947. He served his guru for twelve years, perfecting every aspect of spiritual life. Thereafter, he travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent as a wandering ascetic.



Realizing the need of the times as scientific rendition of the ancient system of yoga, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. During the next twenty years, Swami Satyananda hoisted the flag of yoga in every corner of the world, consolidated BSY into a foremost institution of yoga, and authored over eighty major texts on yoga, tantra and spiritual life.

‘Satyananda Yoga’ became a tradition which combines classical knowledge with experiential understanding and a modern outlook. In 1984 he founded the Yoga Research Foundation to synchronize scientific research and yoga, and Sivananda Math to assist the underprivileged. In 1988, at the peak of his achievements, he renounced everything and adopted kshetra sannyasa, living as a paramahansa ascetic. In 1989 Rikhia was revealed to him, where he came to live and performed higher vedic sadhanas in seclusion. Receiving the command to provide for his neighbours in 1991, he allowed the ashram to help the underprivileged villages in the region. From 1995 onwards, he performed a twelve-year Rajasooya Yajna with the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity for all, and in 2007 he announced the establishment of Rikhiapeeth with its mandate to ‘serve, love, give’.

Swami Satyananda attained mahasamadhi, a yogic accomplishment of discarding the body at will to become one with the universal consciousness, in 2009, in the presence of his disciples.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* is a small text of eighteen verses that comprises the last chapter of the *Yajur Veda*. Considered to be the seed of the entire Indian philosophy, it is one of the most profound literary works to date.

This masterful commentary on the Upanishad by Swami Satyananda explains the vedantic concepts in the context of deep yogic insights and personal sadhana. As a result, a different light is thrown on the mantras, reaching a depth of understanding not conventionally found. The original Sanskrit text has been translated and explained in a lucid and comprehensible style, which effortlessly uplifts the reader. The volume also includes Swami Sivananda's teachings on *Ishavasya Upanishad*.



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978-81-85787-21-2